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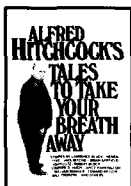
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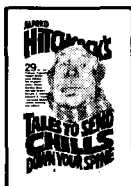
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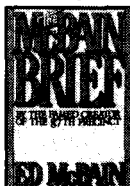


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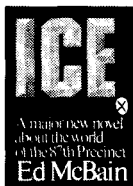


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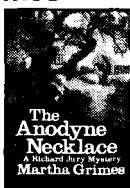


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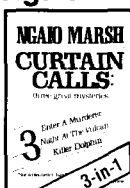


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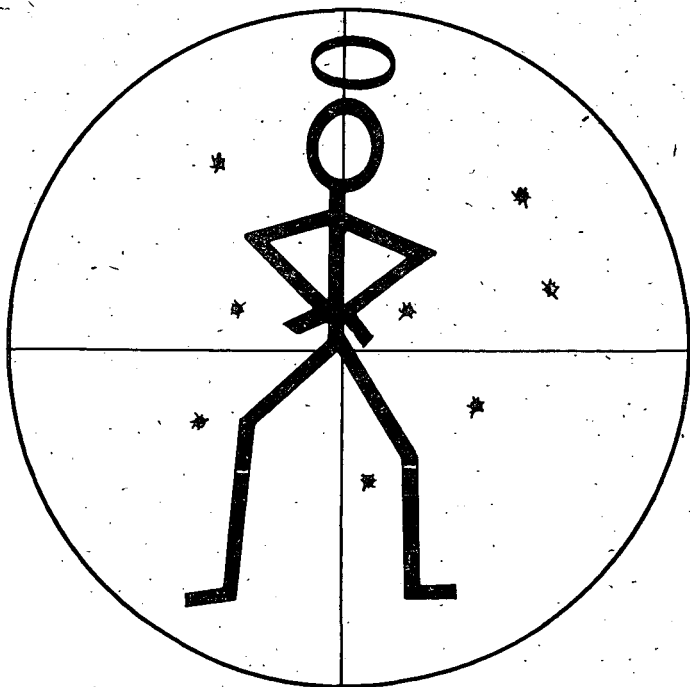
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a **NEW** short story by

ROBERT TWOHY

Quark and Weare—the former a young man on the loose, a nobody going nowhere, the latter a police detective with admitted occupational hangups. A good detective probably salts everything he's served, thought Quark.

Another exceptional story from Robert Twohy, one that combines a Chinese puzzle and a \$64.00 question, with traces of Hemingway and Woolrichlike nightmare . . .

BREAKFAST AT OJAI

by **ROBERT TWOHY**

Quark lay on the couch watching the 11:00 A.M. Perry Mason. The crummy apartment was kind of cozy this morning, a rainy Wednesday. He was glad for the day off—driving cab in the rain is a tough buck, though he could think of worse jobs. Like gravedigging. You'd have to really groove on mud. Somebody rapped on the door.

He slid off the couch and went and opened up. A slim sheriff's deputy in a plastic raincoat and a plastic-topped cap asked, was he James Quark?

He flashed on tickets maybe lost or neglected. Sheriff's deputies don't walk around on rainy days knocking on doors to tell people, hey, good news, you have no outstanding warrants. At least that had never happened to Quark. Twice in the eight years he'd been driving in San Mateo he'd had a deputy at the door and both times it had been about unpaid tickets. He said he was Quark.

The guy was looking in a black notebook. Did Quark know George or Ann Mills, of Ojai?

He got a knot in the gut—he'd as soon not hear about that town.

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He didn't like that town. He'd been there just once and that time hadn't really been *there* but in a house in the hills over it. A Sunday two months ago, in February—a day to be not remembered if he could. He didn't feel like thanking the deputy for mentioning Ojai.

But it wasn't the guy's fault, or if it was there wasn't anything to do about it except answer the question—no, he didn't know any people named Mills, what about them?

It seemed they had Quark's name and address in a notebook.

Notebook. The gut knot got tighter. He asked, "What color?"

The deputy said he didn't know, why?

"A woman in Ojai wrote my name and address in a red spiral notebook. But her name wasn't Mills, it was de Solis." *Ann de Solis*. "Who's Ann Mills?" Quark asked.

The deputy said he didn't know, but sometime last night in the year's worst storm, she and George Mills had gone off Kings Mountain Road, which comes down from the Skyline into Woodside—

Quark nodded that he knew the road, ten miles southwest of San Mateo, a winding eight-mile stretch, two lanes rimming a wooded slope, okay in good weather but hairy on a wild night like last night.

"Killed?"

He got a nod, which rated a moment of silence, then he said, "Silver Porsche?"

The deputy looked in his notes and said no, a green '72 Dodge van.

Quark said the Ojai woman he knew was first-named Ann, but she'd driven a silver Porsche when she'd picked him up hitchhiking out of L.A.

When was that? Last February.

Was there a husband? Yeah.

His first name? André.

What did he say their last name was? De Solis.

Address in Ojai? —Quark didn't know.

The deputy stroked his fangs with his top lip, reminding Quark of Bogart pondering a move. "I was supposed to find out what you knew about these people, if they might have any local relatives—"

"If the woman's Ann de Solis, no. Her husband might have some, in France."

"They're French?"

"He was. She was American."

"I can run you down to Redwood, you can look at the Millses' licenses, see if they're these friends of yours—"

"Not friends. I only saw them one day for a couple of hours."

"Well, if they're the same people you can talk to a detective there, if he wants. I'll fix you up a ride back."

"I'll get dressed." Quark had on just his shorts. "Want to come in?"

The deputy said that was okay, he'd wait in the car out front.

Quark shut off Perry and got dressed, got his rain jacket and a wool cap, and twenty minutes later he was zinging north on the freeway in the rain toward Redwood City, due east of Woodside, above which is Kings Mountain Road, off which had gone, in last night's storm, a Dodge van in which were George and Ann Mills of Ojai—who might be André and Ann de Solis.

The deputy took him to the third floor of the eight-floor County Courthouse, to the Sheriff's Department, and down a hall to a cubicle with a desk jammed to the wall, a bookcase, two metal chairs, and a small guy about fifty in a nothing grey suit with a face that went with it. The deputy said he was Sergeant Weare and told Weare who Quark was and summarized what Quark had told him and got out.

Weare laid a pair of California drivers' licenses on the end of the desk in front of Quark, who had taken the chair there. Quark looked at the photos—of a pretty blonde woman in her early forties and of a man with a bony jaw, frizzled grey hair, and cool, shrewd eyes in his early sixties—and said they were the de Solises. The names on the licenses were George Floyd Mills and Ann Patrice Mills, same Ojai address. Both licenses would expire birthdate 1984.

"They told you their name was de Solis?" Weare had hooked a yellow legal pad out of the pile of junk on the desk and put a pencil to it. The page was already scrawled over.

Quark said yeah. Weare asked how to spell it. Quark spelled it. Weare asked how he knew, which surprised Quark. What difference did it make how he knew, he asked. Weare shrugged, gave a dim smile—"None, probably. Just a question—sometimes they lead somewhere. Did they spell it for you?"

Quark said no—he'd seen the name on the brass plates.

What brass plates?

"Under each head. A brass plate with a date, a place-name in Africa, and under that André or Ann de Solis, meaning the animal had been shot by him or her on that date at that place."

Weare said amiably, "What are you talking about?"

"The heads in the trophy room."

"Where?"

"At their house."

"You were at their house?" Quark said yeah. "And they had a trophy room?" Yeah. "Were they hunters?" They had been.

Weare said he hadn't known that still went on.

Quark said he wouldn't know—the de Solises, rather the Millses, had told him they'd gotten the trophies in Africa in the '50s and '60s.

Weare wrote. Quark asked if there was anything funny about the accident.

Weare said no. "It looks like they missed a turn, went over, bounced, and rolled a long ways." His eyes were a color match for his suit, maybe a little peppier but not much.

"We notified the Ventura sheriff and they went to the address but nobody answered. Nobody around seems to know them. Somebody thought they might have lived there a couple of years."

"That's what she told me. Did they go in the house?"

"Not yet. Did they say where they came from?"

"She said France."

"You told the deputy you thought they didn't have any relatives in the Bay area."

"She said she didn't have any at all. He might have some in France."

"She told you that?"

"No. I mean she said she didn't have any—that's all she said about relatives. If he had any, they'd be in France, I guess."

Weare put a red spiral notebook, 5x8", in front of him. Quark opened it and looked at the top page, saw his name and address in blue ballpoint. He leafed it, didn't see any other writing, and put it down.

"Why did she take your name and address?"

"We were in the trophy room and he was showing me the heads. She said to put my hand on a big rhino head I was looking at and smile. She had a little camera. Took some shots, said she'd send me some prints. I gave her my address and she wrote it in this notebook."

Weare made a note or two. "Seems you were friendly with them."

"Not really."

"What does that mean?"

"Nothing. I mean—" He meant that he'd said all he wanted to about that morning two months ago, which had been fine, then had gone sour. "I was hitchhiking, she asked me to come home for break-

fast, I did, we had breakfast, she took my photo, the three of us talked a little, and I left. That was it."

"Did she send you the prints?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I dunno."

"Did you write to ask her about them?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I didn't know their address."

"Did you try to look it up?"

"No." He felt his eyes sliding around. He steadied them on Weare's grey gaze, but they slid off. He felt clammy in the hands.

Weare said in his nothing voice, "Something bothering you?"

Yeah, you are. "Well, you said there was nothing funny about the accident. But you seem to have a lot of questions."

"Do I?" Weare had his smile. "Occupational, probably. I'm wondering why they were on Kings Mountain Road, not a road people from out of the area would take unless they had a reason. Particularly in a storm."

"Maybe they got lost."

"Also I'm wondering why they were in the Bay area. Could they have been on their way to your place?"

"No."

"Maybe to deliver the prints?"

"Were there prints in the van?"

"Not in front, anyway. The back was too smashed to get into. We made sure nobody was back there and let it go at that for now. The van's at the base of the slope, up to the hips in mud. We won't be able to get it out till the rains ease up."

Quark said, "They wouldn't have been heading for my place."

"You sound pretty certain."

Quark got it that Weare smelled something—didn't know what, but smelled it. It might tie into the accident or it might not, but he was going to find what it was. Because that was what he did, and why he was a detective sergeant.

Quark had had enough. Best thing was to tell the story, feel like six cents' worth of dogmeat, then get out of here and start forgetting about it all again.

"Let me back up a ways, okay? It'll make more sense if I come on it gradually."



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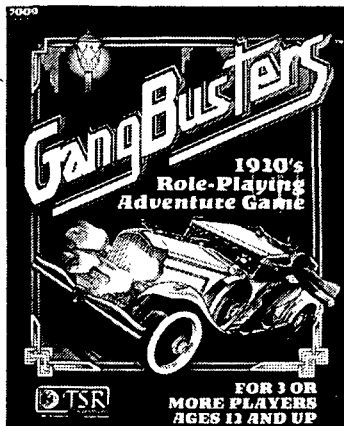
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He was silent a fair number of beats, trying to get things straight, then he started with how he'd got an impulse to go down to L.A., a place he didn't like, but once every couple of years he'd get that impulse and give way to it. He'd bus down and hang around in bars he'd read about where celebrities were supposed to come. They never did.

Two months ago, Saturday February fifth, he'd tripped down and visited some class bars, seeing nobody, getting fairly tanked, and filtering down to some low-grade bars, where in one he got suckered into a money pool match and lost not only all his money but his nice sports jacket and quality shoes, getting in exchange a ragged sweater and a pair of sneakers in which he shambled around in the night till he found a junk car, which he climbed into, and slept—waking up about 5:00 A.M. Sunday, frozen and half starved, walking to the freeway and not believing it when inside five minutes the first north-bound car, a silver Porsche, pulled up.

He nodded at Ann Mills' license on the desk. "Her. Stylish clothes, jewelry, a gold wedding ring—I thought she was dumb to stop and told her so, said she shouldn't pick up strays, not in a car like that, looking like she did."

She said that the second she'd spotted him she'd got good feelings. He told her feelings could steer a woman into trouble. She said she guessed so, but she liked to give people a hand.

He'd observed her at the wheel—clean-drawn profile, little smile, green eye softly glowing. A very pretty lady, just short of beautiful.

She was friendly and chatty, and as they tripped north she asked who he was, where he was heading, what he did for a living, and so forth. She rattled on about herself, said she was on her way home from a night in L.A., had been to a concert last night and stayed at a motel—just making talk, passing the miles, being sociable.

She asked what had brought him to L.A.—had he been visiting a relative? He said he didn't have any and she said she didn't either, just her husband. Her profiled eye had a glow as she talked about him, about Africa and how they'd been hunters till he got sick. It had been a wonderful life. When he got sick, they'd moved to France. He was from an old family there, they'd lived in a big chateau on the Mediterranean.

"Did you believe her?"

"Why not? It went with the car, the clothes. She wasn't coming on like a duchess, just talking."

"Being sociable." Weare had that dim smile. Sarcasm? Probably. He'd said it himself—he had occupational hangups. A good detective probably salts everything he's served.

Ann Mills, who had told him her name was Ann de Solis, told Quark that her husband had gotten sicker, and wanted to see California—he'd been everywhere, but not the Golden State. So they came, two years ago.

"Did she mention they owned a Dodge van?"

"No."

"Or that her sick husband had a California driver's license?"

"No."

Weare wrote for a few seconds. Quark waited till he looked up, then went on. "We were coming up on Ventura. She asked would I like to come home, meet her husband, see their trophies, have some breakfast. I said that sounded great but I better stay on 101. She said it was only ten miles or so, she'd drive me back—"

"Seems like she really wanted you to come."

"Yeah. I couldn't figure why, but we'd hit it off good. She knew I was hungry and broke, wanted to help me out, I guess."

"She could have slipped you a few bucks and dropped you near a restaurant."

Quark shrugged. "I guess so. Anyway, I took her up on it, and she turned off the freeway. In a few minutes, we were in the hills over Ojai. Big estates. She went down a drive and behind the trees was this ranch-type house—nice place, big low rooms, good furniture, I guess, but not much of it. This thin bird—" he nodded at George Mills' license "—in a bathrobe came rolling into the living room in a wheelchair. She told him I was Jim Quark, I'd been hitchhiking, she'd asked me for breakfast."

"How'd he take that—surprised?"

"No. He just nodded, said he was glad to meet me." Quark thought of something. "Was there a wheelchair in the van?"

"I didn't see one—it's possible." Quark remembered Weare had said they couldn't get in the back of the van.

Weare bounced the pencil rubber around on his thin lips. "Back on the freeway, after you took up her invitation, did she stop?"

"For what?"

"Anything."

Quark thought, then said, "Yeah. At a station, for the ladies' room. I went in the men's, cleaned up some."

"Was there a phone?"

Quark couldn't recall.

Weare bounced the pencil some more. "What was your impression of him?"

"Pleasant enough. Sad-type voice, fairly heavy French accent. He made a face now and then, like in sudden pain, but he looked healthier than he acted, if you get me."

Weare said amiably that he didn't.

"Well . . . He was thin, but his color was good. He didn't look wasted—eyes were clear. But he sat sort of caved in, had that low voice, sighed some—"

"And made some faces." Weare wrote a little bit, then nodded Quark to go on.

"She went to make breakfast. We talked."

"What about?"

"Oh, weather, L.A., this and that. Then she brought plates and we moved to the table at the far end of the room. It was a good breakfast—scrambled eggs, sausages, rolls. They didn't eat much, mostly drank coffee and watched me eat. I was feeling good, glad I'd come—then things got heavy."

"How?"

"He asked her how was the concert—and turned to me and said she loved to go to L.A. on weekends to hear great artists, that it was wonderful she had this new interest, life being dull for her now, him in the condition he was. But at least she had her weekends, could go off to L.A. and lose herself in beautiful music, and afterwards go to a fine luxury motel—L.A. had so many superb motels. He said it nicely, too nicely."

"He was needling?"

"That's what I got. She didn't say anything, but was tight around the mouth. Then I got it that the needle wasn't just for her—every time he said 'motel,' he'd shoot me a glance."

Weare rubbed his small-change jaw. "Like hinting that she'd picked you up the night before, maybe you winding up at her motel?"

"Yeah. Which made no sense, because if true she'd hardly bring me home to meet him—so I thought. And figured I was wrong, he wasn't hinting anything. Anyway, that was it. He talked about other things, Africa mostly—the wonderful land, the people, the animals, the excitement of hunting—and was pleasant again. She seemed to ease up, and things went okay the rest of the meal."

"She cleared off and he said he'd show me the trophies. We went down the hall to this big, dark-green room—heads, the gun rack,

and so forth. She came in while he was pointing out photos—him standing by a dead buffalo, her with the Duke of something, him with an old guy who'd been a buddy of Hemingway, him and her standing by their plane."

"You saw him and her in the photos?"

Quark nodded, puzzled. Why wouldn't they be in their own photos? He gave Weare space to follow up, if he wanted, but he didn't. So Quark went on, "He showed me the rifles—very classy, silver trick-work."

Weare raised his pencil and sighted down it, turned it slightly toward Quark—then laid it down and smiled sort of apologetically, though Quark didn't know why. He hadn't pointed it at him and what if he had? Just a silly gesture, brought on by talk about rifles—meaning nothing more than that this quiet guy was capable of a silly gesture, like just about everyone.

"So he showed you the photos and the heads and she took your picture—then what?"

Quark was at the edge of the square he'd rather not be at, but here he was. He blew a few breaths and stepped out onto it. "I said it was time I got going. She said she'd be a minute, and left.

"Her husband said, 'She's an exciting woman, isn't she?' He had that look like at the table. I thought, Oh oh, trouble.

"He said, 'She's always warmed by earthy young men.' He laughed like it wasn't funny and said, Why not? Should she have to live on memories of the lover he'd been?"

Quark didn't have to tangle with that one because de Solis looked at him with those cool eyes and said quietly, "I know you made love to her last night."

Quark told him that was nuts—would she have brought him home?

De Solis said she would and did. A half dozen times she'd brought young men from her trips to L.A.—it was a sort of compulsion to confess, to say without saying that she'd betrayed him again—would he forgive her again? He told Quark, "I always have. A few remarks slip out, like at the table, then I'm back in control and she knows that once more she's been forgiven."

Quark stopped talking. Weare's eyes were steady on him. He was down to the core and Weare wanted all of it.

"I insisted I hadn't slept with his wife. He wheeled away to a big old rolltop desk and opened a drawer. I didn't know what he'd bring out—a pistol? But it was a handful of bills.

"He said something like, this would signify an agreement, a pact between us, that the affair was ended and I wouldn't see her again. He said it would be a matter of trust, between men of honor—the money would seal it. He smiled and held out the money. If I took it, I'd be agreeing that what he suspected was true."

"That you'd slept with her." Quark nodded. "What did you do?"

"Took it."

"What happened then?"

"She came in. Or maybe she'd been there a while. He said in a pleasant way that he'd given me some money to help me get home, and that he didn't want her to drive me—I had plenty for cabfare to Ventura and for a bus ticket. He reached for the phone.

"She gave me a crooked smile, like things had turned out about like she'd expected. She didn't say anything, just walked out of the room."

"You think she knew what he'd said to you?"

"She might have."

"She didn't act angry, confused?"

"No. She just gave me that smile and walked out."

"So he called a cab. Then what?"

"I walked down the driveway to the road. The cab came, I took it to the Ventura bus, and took the bus home."

So that was it. The story seemed less lousy out in the air than when it had been inside him. It was Weare's story now. He'd wanted it and now he had it, and was welcome to it, to do whatever he wanted with.

He got a twinge of good feeling for this small grey guy for getting him to tell about that morning in Ojai that had ended with him taking money to go along with a lie about a man's wife, a woman who had been decent to him.

Weare gave a small sigh. "It reminds me of an old B movie."

Quark looked a question. He knew X, G, R movies—didn't know B's.

"Cheap movies they used to grind out to fill out the double feature. Stale dialogue, unreal motivations, a phony confrontation scene, usually—like dying aristocrat accuses handsome young ne'er-do-well of trifling with his wife, pays him to get out of her life forever. . . How much did he give you?"

"Sixty-four bucks."

Weare made a slight choke, but if it was the start of a laugh he swallowed it. He picked up the pencil, sighted along it at the blank

wall, murmured, "An insult? To you, her, one-night stands in general? Was that the point of this foolishness—just an insult?"

Quark didn't know. "I thought of finding out his address, sending him the sixty-four with interest, telling him the whole thing was a lie, but I didn't." His good intentions usually remained that, till they gave up and died. "I thought, it's over, leave it lay."

Weare blew another sigh. "Lies within lies, like a Chinese box." He gave Quark a nod. "Thanks for stopping by."

Quark got up, asked what he meant about Chinese boxes.

"Oh, nothing, probably—I get weird ideas sometimes. If anything comes of this, I'll get in touch." He asked where Quark worked, found a clean place on the pad and wrote it down.

Quark thought of telling him the deputy had said he'd fix him up with a ride, but didn't—it was the deputy's promise, not Weare's. He wasn't surprised that it hadn't come to anything—people forget when it's not them who have to walk to the bus.

He walked six blocks to the depot, glad that the rain had cut back to a sullen drizzle, and took the 7B back to San Mateo.

She cried, Why?

De Solis was in his wheelchair, a pile of rocks in his lap. He threw one. It bounced off her, didn't seem to hurt. Quark had the idea she might be faking as she cried, Why, why?

De Solis told Quark, Throw it, and passed him a rock.

He didn't want to. He didn't get the point. De Solis said, It's a game, borrowed from an old B movie.

—I didn't make love to your wife.

—Throw it anyway.

—No.

De Solis handed him money. Quark threw the rock. She caught it, laughed, tossed it to de Solis, who tossed it back. It wasn't a rock, it was a beachball, red and yellow. They laughed as they tossed it back and forth.

A vulture hunched on the rolltop desk giggled and hugged itself with shabby wings. A black wart on its cheek pulsed excitedly.

De Solis wore a black robe and strode around as the wheelchair shrank to a toy, then to matchbox size. He slid it in a pocket. All the heads on the walls were the jury, looking at Quark like he'd turned out just like they'd thought he would. De Solis told him, You threw the rock.

—No, it was a beachball.

—This is *my* stale old movie, I'm the director—I say you threw the rock.

The vulture stepped around on the desk, grinning and licking its wart. —He did it. I saw it all.

Quark shouted, You weren't even there!

The vulture spread its repulsive wings and screamed exaltedly, I am the ghost of deaths not yet hatched! and fell off the desk.

Ann de Solis climbed up on the desk and wept. The heads on the walls wept with her.

A guy in shadows who Quark couldn't make out growled, Do a rotten thing for peanuts and you're despicable. He seemed to like the word, repeating, Despicable, despicable!

De Solis asked the witness, Ann, while the heads listened raptly, If he hadn't lied, what would you have done?

—Found someone else to play. We're fair that way, aren't we? she said to de Solis.

He said, Life is unfair but death is for the deserving who it's nice when they're good-looking.

He has nice eyes, said Ann.

—And a well shaped head.

They both smiled at the shape of Quark's head, and so did the jury. He was embarrassed and hid a blush in his hands.

The shadowy guy said sadly, I have a peanut head. Quark saw it was true—he was a peanut all over and was Mr. Peanut.

He held out a peanut and told Quark to beg for it. Quark did, and got the peanut. Mr. Peanut said, See how despicable you are? Quark nodded, seeing. —Despicable, despicable! Mr. Peanut shouted happily, jumping around . . .

Chinese boxes, one inside another—in the insidest was himself, bare-butt naked, four-footed, confused at being there but there anyway, cocking an eye up and seeing peering in at him a green eye softly glowing. Then laughter mixed with other laughter, then a long yellow pencil came probing down at him—then BOOM! and a shrill shriek like a cat on fast broil but not a cat a naked pink mouse rolling rolling down a wet black hillside. He heard whimpering, Why, why? A quiet voice murmured, Why not? He woke up to that.

Thursday broke fresh and snappy, like it had never heard of rain. Quark and the other drivers zipped around purposefully, serving the public and making a buck. It got near shift change. Audrey, the

aging but still lively dispatcher, chirped, "Forty-nine! Gentleman in the office to see you!"

He parked in the cabyard and walked in the back door, and there sat Weare, wan face and drab grey suit both looking like they could use some rest. Quark asked, "What's up?"

Weare's smile was even dimmer than yesterday. "I went down to Ojai."

"Did you?" Quark was surprised but not much. He hadn't thought of Weare going there but somehow it seemed reasonable that he had.

Weare said maybe they could go somewhere and talk.

They left the office and got in a yellow Pinto with some dents, and driving east on Fourth Street Weare said he'd brought back something Quark might find interesting. Quark asked what.

They were on the overpass crossing 101. Weare said, "We could go to Coyote Point. It's nice there, by the water."

"Yeah, it is. What did you bring back?"

Weare was making the turn onto the inner Bayshore leading to the Point, and didn't answer. When he got on the straight, he still didn't. Quark didn't push him because it was plain he was tired and better keep his mind on driving.

He swung by the golf course, turned left into the nearly empty paved parking areas above the beach, and headed across it to where the cement ends. He cut the Pinto, leaned back, stretched, and closed his eyes a few seconds. Quark thought a small, non-peppy guy like him shouldn't be batting down to Ojai and back in such a rush. He asked, had he *driven* all those miles?

Weare said no, he'd flown down yesterday afternoon and got back about four hours ago.

"You said you brought back something."

Weare nodded, but still didn't move to show what it was. Quark got it that he was going to talk first.

His eyes looked like dusty thumbprints . . . "I took along the key-ring that was in Mills' pocket. We went in the house, saw the trophy room—the heads, the guns, the photos, the rolltop desk."

"You and who?"

"Ventura sheriff's detectives. I told him what you'd told me. We talked it over and thought we'd take a look."

Weare yawned and gazed out at the bay, bright in the flaring light of the descending sun. The view was all the way to the City. A heavy storm washes the crud from the sky, and looking over the bay it's

possible to forget for a while what the Bay area has turned into. It becomes like the old days, or that's what Peninsula old-timers had told Quark.

"What mostly interested us was why she'd been so hot to bring you home. What you told me didn't sound like she was turned on sexually."

"She wasn't."

"So all we could figure was that she wanted to take your picture."

"Why?"

"We didn't know, but it was what she did—and got your address. We put that fact with the trophies, the rifles, the brass plates—"

"If she wanted my picture, she could have taken it in the car."

"Maybe she didn't have the camera with her."

Quark shrugged.

Weare said, "Your point is okay, though—we talked about that. If all she wanted was your picture and your address, she'd have had the camera with her. So she wanted something else, too—she had another reason to bring you home.

"We hashed over the big accusation scene, ending with the sixty-four dollars to you, the whole thing so silly it must mean something."

Quark waited, not fooled by the way Weare was woveting around. He was setting things up and would get to the answers, which Quark supposed would include whatever he'd brought back to show him.

"She'd found out stuff about you before she asked you home—you were a loner, no relatives, a drinker, a nobody going nowhere. ... I'm laying it on thick, but that's how she must have sized you up."

Quark said, "You're laying it on about right." He *was* a nobody going nowhere, and generally enjoying the trip. But not all the time. Like right now.

He flashed on the vulture with the excited wart. *I am the ghost of deaths not yet hatched!*

"We wondered if the accusation scene was maybe to see if you'd go along with a lie about the woman, for peanuts—" Mr. Peanut popped into view "—which would show you were a corrupt person, contemptible—"

"Despicable."

Weare looked mildly surprised. "All right—despicable. An unworthy person. No decency, no concern for the good name of an honorable woman." He had his smile. "Sounds old-fashioned? Sure—this is an old-fashioned movie, with old-fashioned stars, who believe in old values, like honor, manliness, virtue, a woman's good

name. You turned your back on those things, helped slander her, and trotted away with your sixty-four dollars. You were despicable, unmanly, without character—one of the faceless herd. Except she had your face.”

Quark was quiet, working things around. A murky shape was forming.

“We looked at the photos in the trophy room, and under the magnifying glass the guy’s ears were different from the photo on Mills’ license. So was the chin. —The guy wasn’t George Mills.”

Quark didn’t argue—he hadn’t studied the photos. The guy had looked like his host, Weare had said it was him, he’d thought it was him. “How about her? Was it her in the photos?”

“Yeah. We nailed that down when we looked in the desk, found letters, business papers, an old diary of hers. She’d lived and hunted in Africa, all right—Mills never had.”

“Who was the guy in the photos?”

Weare rubbed his dusty grey eyes. “André de Solis. An African hunter, like she’d told you—French, very rich, very glamorous, a real Hemingway hero, as we got from the diary and reconstructed from some mementos and stuff in the desk. A lot is guesswork but based on facts that check out, at least so far.

“She’d been Ann Burgess, of Philadelphia, a design student in Paris. She met de Solis in the early Sixties. They married and moved to Africa. He taught her to hunt—it was their life. Then, in the late Sixties he got sick, died.”

“So the heads, the brass plates, the photos were authentic trophies of her life with de Solis.”

Weare nodded. He was looking at the bay, the shine across it fading as the sun headed for bed.

Quark thought a recap was called for. “So there was a real André de Solis, who married Ann, and they show in the African photos—Mills doesn’t. So what she told me about Africa is true, more or less, and what Mills told me was what he’d learned from her, because he was never there. André died. Where does Mills come in?”

Weare let that hang. “When I got back from Ojai, I got some deputies. We got on old clothes and took tools and went out to Kings Mountain. We got in the back of the van—the wheelchair wasn’t there, by the way, I’d seen it in their bedroom in Ojai. Under the back deck of the van, we found a standard Winchester rifle—nothing fancy, no silver trickwork—and a box of shells.”

The shape got clearer. “Which you expected to find.”

Weare nodded.

"Who was Mills?"

"Texas oil heir, traveler, sportsman, playboy. No work. Flamboyant, erratic, *erotic*. Many women—the high life. Lots of guesswork here but we know that sometime in the early Seventies he met Ann de Solis in Paris, and as far as she was concerned he was André reincarnate, come back to her.

"There are plenty of indications she was always borderline. When André died, she slipped over. She and Mills were married and suddenly, or maybe gradually, Mills became de Solis."

Quark closed his eyes, chewed that over, got no taste, looked into the tired grey gaze, and asked, "What do you mean, *became de Solis*?"

Weare sighed. "Still mostly guesswork, but this is what we get. Imagine that Ann's life with de Solis had been romantic, passionate, soaring—all kinds of good things. She adored him. That's in the diary. He's come back to her and they'll have that life all over again. Imagine that Mills is borderline, too. To gain the adoration of this fascinating woman, he'll join her fantasy—shed his old existence and become André, the sublime lord of her past.

"The fantasy takes over. They're André and Ann de Solis, it's the Sixties, and they're hunter and huntress. But Africa is closing out. The old days, old ways, old places are going if not gone. But they must hunt, it's their existence, their expression, their act of love. I'm exaggerating, but isn't that what madness is—exaggeration beyond limit? So they'll hunt, and life will be like it was—the commitment, the excitement, the terror, the ecstasy, the glory."

He looked out at the bay and went silent.

After a while Quark said, "So they were in the Bay area because I'd flunked the test."

"Not flunked it—passed it. Some didn't. Did I mention that the red notebook had eighteen pages missing?"

"Meaning?"

"Maybe nothing. Or maybe that some guys walked away from the money, so the Millses tore up their pictures and addresses. Remember, they're people of another time, another world, gentlemen sportsmen playing by rules they'd set up, playing fair. Only guys who passed the test, took the money, joined in the lie, were eligible for the hunt."

Quark flashed on the black-robed de Solis and Ann on the witness desk. *If he hadn't lied, what would you have done? —Found someone else to play.*

So his own crazy dream complemented Weare's guesswork, or imaginings or whatever, and made a case—based on what facts? A rifle in their wrecked van like 50,000 National Rifle Association members carry, an address in her notebook they might have forgotten was there, some lies about photos, about Mills' health, about who he was. So? So they were a weird couple, no doubt of that, but did it add up the way Weare suggested—that they'd come to the Bay area on a hunting trip?

He muttered, "It could be all *your* fantasy."

Weare motioned over his shoulder. "Briefcase, your side of the deck."

Quark reached back and pulled the heavy, scuffed brown briefcase up and over to him. Weare extracted a slick black album and laid it on Quark's knees.

Quark lifted the cover, looked at a blank black page, turned it, and saw a glossy 8x11" enlarged color closeup of a smiling, dark-haired young man, no background, picture cropped so the head filled it.

On the opposite page was a neatly typed label—

June 19 1976

Madden Falls Nebr

André de Solis

He turned the page, saw another young guy's face in closeup, wide-eyed like not expecting the camera, picture cropped the same—

Aug 10 1977

Wichita Kas

André de Solis

"What is this?"

"Collection of pictures, looks like."

Next page—another frame-filling face, an old guy this time. Drinker's nose, straggly hair, wavery grin—

Oct 22 1978

Portland Ore

Ann de Solis

Weare's mild voice: "Can't expect a prize every time. Legitimate head, though."

"Where'd you get this?"

"Bottom locked drawer of the desk. I had to do some finagling to bring it—told them I'd have it back tomorrow. Convinced them you had a right to see it, since you're the guy who's broke two murders so far, more to come if we're lucky."

Quark realized he was sagging, got back straight. Weare went on: "One in Baton Rouge, one in Kennafritts. That's in Georgia. The guys' pictures are further on. Unsolved killings, shot down in the street at night. Loners, strays, no relatives—"

Quark whispered, "How many photos?"

"Eleven. Turn to the last one."

He had a feeling he was making a mistake, but went on and made it. And got a jolt in the gut that nearly caved him in. Grinning back at him was himself, an enlarged closeup like the others, background cropped out like the others—just the head, like the others. That's all the de Solises had wanted—just the heads.

He has nice eyes.

And a well shaped head.

He felt himself being steadied, propped back up. Weare said, "Look at the opposite page."

Quark blew air, got himself together. He hadn't dropped the album, or Weare had slid it back on his lap. He looked at the blank black page opposite his picture.

"You're the only one without a label."

"So they were coming up to label me."

"Why not?" Quark flashed on the despairing wail of the naked mouse, *Why, why?*—and the soft answer, *Why not?*

Weare said, "Game on the hoof, all of you. She'd spot you, get her good feelings about you, find out about you, take you home—wherever home was at the time. They moved around the country, renting in stylish areas, keeping apart from neighbors—went on a hunt every year or so. The fantasy took over periodically—if any of this is true—and between times they lived more or less as George and Ann Mills, wealthy retired couple. Eleven photos, including yours, and eighteen pages missing from the notebook. So maybe seven guys didn't get shot. Because they walked away from the money, which made them not eligible."

His smile was one-cornered. "Or maybe that's nonsense. Maybe the torn-out pages were old recipes. There's a lot we don't know, and never will. This won't wind up ten bodies, all neatly packaged, in a row. There'll be lots of slop, questions, loose ends. But so far, two murders connect—more or less, anyway."

Quark licked his lips, which could use the moisture. "So they picked strays, loners, guys who wouldn't be missed much, or investigated much—"

Weare nodded. "A guy shot down at night for no known reason.

Some nut shot him, for kicks maybe, or to see if he had the nerve. There are plenty of nuts and plenty of guns, and the Millses moved around—who'd find the pattern?"

"You did."

"Pushed a wild notion and got cooperation down there. There's plenty we don't know. Like what they were doing coming down Kings Mountain Road, late at night, in the middle of a storm."

Quark didn't know.

Weare asked, in an offhand way, "Are you religious?"

"Not particularly." He had a thought. "Who was driving?"

"He was, it looked like."

"Maybe he just got fed up with it."

Weare's eyebrows asked, with what?

"With being André de Solis. With killing guys. With being crazy."

Weare's eyebrows stayed up. Quark said, "Maybe it stopped being fun."

"What, being crazy?"

"Yeah. People have different ideas of fun. Did Son of Sam have fun? Or Gacy? Would they have kept on with their craziness if it wasn't fun? I dunno. Do you?"

Weare shook his head. He didn't argue, or look like Quark had gone simple-minded. Maybe he was too tired to pick up on it, so he let it slide.

He put the album back into the briefcase and gave it to Quark to put back on the deck.

The sun was about to tuck itself in. The bay looked cool and sleepy and about as beautiful as Quark had ever seen it.

Weare got in reverse, made a loop, and started back toward San Mateo.

Quark said, "I don't knock it, though. I like the idea behind it."

Weare nodded. He didn't ask what Quark was referring to, so Quark guessed he knew.

Weare drove him to his address on South Claremont. Quark said, "Thanks for stopping by." He slid out, held the door a few seconds. "You probably should get some rest before you head back for Ventura."

Weare blinked, smiled his dim smile, flipped a flipper in appreciation of words well meant. Quark closed the door and watched as the bunged-up yellow Pinto slid south down Delaware.

Then he went up the stairs toward his crummy but at times cozy apartment.

a **NEW** short story by

JUNE THOMSON

It was obvious that the stranger's presence in the paddock was ultimately Blower's responsibility. After all, he owned it. Remembering Blower's bright little eyes and air of suppressed amusement, Major Rossiter was quite certain that some form of skullduggery was going on and that Blower was at the back of it...

This is the first appearance in EQMM of June Thomson, the very popular British writer, who was awarded the French Prix du Roman d'Aventure this year for Shadow of a Doubt, the eighth novel in her crime series starring Detective Inspector Rudd. We know that, like us, you will be looking forward to more stories by her in Ellery Queen...

DEAD GROUND

by **JUNE THOMSON**

Major Rossiter liked to think of it as *his* view, partly because no other house in the village shared it but largely because he had bought Charmont Villa for its sake.

The house itself was undistinguished-looking. Detached and vaguely neo-Tudor in design, it was built of red-brick with diamond-pane windows of such mean proportions that all the rooms were dark and oppressive. It stood in three-quarters of an acre of neglected garden and was, in addition, an inconvenient half a mile from the village.

All these reasons should have dissuaded Major Rossiter from buying it. Indeed, as he had tramped round it with his wife two years earlier, accompanied by the estate agent, his reaction had been that

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they were wasting their time. He had indicated as much to his wife, shaking his head at her behind the fellow's back. Not that Phoebe would have expressed an opinion. She left that sort of decision to him. And quite right, too.

No, he was looking for something completely different; somewhere pleasant where he could enjoy his retirement from the Army; not too much garden; close to a golf club and a decent pub and in the type of area where he would find people to share his interests: a little bridge, the occasional dinner party, a bit of rough shooting.

He doubted if the village would supply any of these. The sight of it as they had driven through on their way to view the house was enough to put him off. It was a dreary little place in the Major's opinion, its center dominated by a ramshackle garage and a huddle of outbuildings constructed almost entirely, it seemed, out of corrugated iron.

He had commented on it as they passed.

"That needs coming down for a start," he had said, only half jokingly.

That was before he saw the house and decided, as soon as they stepped inside the gloomy hall, that he had no intention of buying the place anyway.

"And this is the lounge," the estate agent had announced, throwing open a door.

Lounge! Good God! Major Rossiter had thought, surveying the pink-flowered wallpaper, the mock parquet linoleum, the castellated fireplace of bright red bricks.

And then he had seen the view.

Even framed in the two tiny windows which overlooked the back garden and cut into pieces by the fiddly little diamond panes, it had been—well, impressive was hardly the word.

It was stupendous! Magnificent! Overwhelming!

It extended for miles beyond the shaggy lawn and the overgrown shrubs of the garden—a wide vista of cornfields and pasture running down to water meadows and the river, which swept round in great, shining curves, glittering in the afternoon sunshine, before rising on the far side to more open farmland and the distant wooded slopes of the horizon.

Almost as if he had been bewitched, he heard himself saying, "Yes, I'll take it."

He meant the view, of course, not the house. It was only when he saw the look of gratified astonishment on the estate agent's face

that he recovered his senses sufficiently to add, "Subject to contract and a satisfactory surveyor's report."

"Are you sure, George?" his wife had asked later as they drove away.

Sure? Of course he was sure. He had never been so certain of anything in his life before.

"Only the kitchen seemed a little—"

"Oh, we'll soon sort that out," Major Rossiter had interrupted her confidently. Indeed, it was rare for Mrs. Rossiter ever to finish a sentence. "All it needs is a few new fittings."

But his mind was not really on kitchen cupboards and sink units. He was busy planning much more exciting and important improvements.

He'd have those two tiny windows out for a start and the whole of that back wall demolished to take a huge floor-to-ceiling picture window which would bring the view into the drawing room. Then the garden would have to be replanned, the lawn extended, those trees which partly obscured the vista cut down and a patio built outside the window. His imagination rested fondly on long summer evenings when, decanter and soda syphon at his side, he would simply sit and gaze at the view. His view!

The house was duly bought, and over the next year Major Rossiter put his plans into action. Surveying it when everything was finished, the curtains hung, his cups for shooting lined up on the bureau facing the picture window—which now formed a magnificent fourth wall—Major Rossiter felt well pleased with himself. He had come to grips with the damned place.

The garden proved less tractable. The main problem was the field which lay at the bottom, between his property and the view. Once the trees and bushes were removed in order to open up the vista, Major Rossiter discovered to his annoyance that the field was also revealed and could be overlooked from the drawing-room window.

It was a small, neglected paddock, dock and nettle ridden, containing a dilapidated stable in one corner in which an old white horse appeared to have taken up residence. Not only did the horse lean over Major Rossiter's fence to observe the house with melancholy interest as it browsed on the shoots of the Major's newly planted rhododendrons, but it was possible to see the corrugated iron roof of its stable no matter how carefully the Major positioned his trees and shrubs.

"If I owned it, I'd pull the blasted thing down," Major Rossiter told his wife.

"Perhaps you could buy the field," Mrs. Rossiter suggested mildly, at which her husband snorted with derision at the absurdity of the idea before leaving the room and slamming the door behind him. Buy the field! The woman didn't know what she was talking about! Hadn't he got enough garden to cope with as it was? What would he do with a scrubby little piece of land like that?

However, over the next few days, as Major Rossiter prowled about the garden, shooing away the horse and glaring at the ramshackle shed it occupied, the idea took seed.

Why not buy it? he thought. Land was always valuable and he could not imagine the owner of the field would ask much for such a miserable bit of it.

Careful inquiries in the village elicited the owner's name, and two days later, dressed in tweed hacking jacket and cavalry twill trousers, Major Rossiter's tall, upright figure set off in search of Mr. Blower, swinging his walking stick confidently.

Mr. Blower was not difficult to find. In addition to the paddock, he owned the rundown garage which dominated the center of the village.

It was a damned eyesore, Major Rossiter decided, surveying it disapprovingly at close quarters as he approached the forecourt. An ugly, pebble-dashed bungalow, its garden full of broken-down cars and piles of old tires, occupied one side of the site while the other was taken up by a huge barnlike construction of creosoted wood, where repairs were carried out by Mr. Blower and his son, although Major Rossiter, viewing the pair of them in passing, wouldn't have trusted as much as Mrs. Rossiter's bicycle to either of them. A small shed, not unlike the one which the horse occupied and which spoiled the Major's view, labeled optimistically "Office," sat in the middle behind the petrol pumps. It was from this building that Mr. Blower emerged as Major Rossiter approached.

"Morning, Major Rossiter!" Mr. Blower greeted him, although quite how the fellow had acquired his name the Major was at a loss to understand.

He was a small, bright-eyed, slightly bandy-legged man, dressed in filthy overalls, with one of those ingratiating smiles the Major instinctively distrusted.

"Ah, Blower!" Major Rossiter returned, coming to a halt in front of the petrol pumps. Uncharacteristically, he felt at a loss how to

begin. He was not used to doing business with men like Blower; more usually he gave them orders. Consequently, he had not the faintest idea how to address the man. Hardly as an equal—but as a superior officer to an other-ranker seemed also inappropriate, despite Blower's oil-stained hands and local accent.

"There's a small—ah—matter of—ah—business I'd like to discuss with you," the Major began.

At the word "business," Blower's face assumed a serious expression, although his eyes continued to twinkle disconcertingly.

"In that case, Major, you'd better step inside," he replied, leading the way into the tiny office. "So what can I do for you?" he continued, leaning up against the desk, which was littered with old sparking-plugs.

"Actually, I wanted to see you about that field behind my house, which I understand you own," the Major replied in an offhand voice. "I could be interested in buying it if the price suits me—not that it's going to add much to my property." Better not sound too eager, he thought. Keep the fellow in suspense.

"Ah, that field," Blower said ruminatively. "Nice bit of land, that."

"In rather poor condition, I'd say," the Major countered. "Full of docks and nettles. I also noticed the fences want repairing."

"You could be right there," Blower conceded magnanimously. "But there's the stable as goes with it. Useful, that. You could store a lot of stuff in there."

"Judging by the state of the roof, I doubt it's weatherproof," Major Rossiter retorted.

"Only needs some bits of corrugated iron tacked on here and there. You could likely pick up a few sheets cheap. As a matter of fact, I've got a fair amount of it knocking about the place here."

"How much?" Major Rossiter demanded.

It was time, he felt, that the preliminary skirmishes were finished and the real negotiations began.

Blower thought, head on one side. "I reckon I could do the lot for ten quid."

"I mean the field, man!" Major Rossiter exclaimed impatiently. For the first time during the conversation, it occurred to him that Blower was finding a great deal of quiet amusement in the situation.

There was a small silence as Blower regarded him with his bright little eyes.

"Two thousand," he said at last.

"Two thousand!" The Major was scandalized. Drawing himself up

to his full height, he looked the fellow up and down, from the top of his greasy cap to the toes of the battered boots that protruded from the torn cuffs of his overalls. "Good morning, Mr. Blower," he continued stiffly. "If you ever consider putting the field on the market at a more acceptable price, I might be interested in doing business with you," and he turned away without giving the man a second glance.

As he said later to his wife, "I've put the ball firmly in the fellow's court. It's up to him now."

But Blower seemed unaware of this fact, for, although the weeks passed, he made no attempt to approach the Major nor to reopen negotiations. Meanwhile, the horse continued to occupy the paddock and to browse quietly off the top of the flowering shrubs as it contemplated the back of Charmont Villa and its garden—while the Major, in his turn, stood at the picture window, glaring much less pacifically at it and the corrugated iron slope of the stable roof, which protruded itself infuriatingly into the bottom left-hand corner of his view, quite ruining the magnificent sweep of cornfield and river, meadow and distant woods.

As day succeeded day and still Blower made no move, the Major's temper shortened until the sight of the horse and its stable became so intolerable he could no longer bear to stroll about in his own garden.

It was an absurd situation in which to find himself, and all because of that wretched little plot of land!

And then, on a Sunday morning, events began to move. Phoebe, returning from church—which she always attended alone, Major Rossiter having quarreled with the vicar over the question of nuclear disarmament—announced that there was a car parked in the paddock gateway and a man was measuring the field.

"Blower, d'you mean?" her husband demanded.

"I don't think so, dear," she replied. "He's wearing a suit."

Major Rossiter flung down the newspaper and went to reconnoiter.

For once, Phoebe was right. The man pacing out the paddock was not Blower. He was a tall, gangling individual, dressed in bright navy-blue with a broad chalk stripe, and with one of those heads which, even at a distance, looked common, having a distinctly underbred slope to the back of it and greasy, dark hair worn too long at the nape of the neck.

The man seemed absorbed in his task and was unaware either of

the Major's curiosity or the horse's, which, banished to its stable, was watching his actions over the top of the half door.

Major Rossiter watched, too.

The man was clearly measuring an area of the field by pacing slowly and carefully across it, halting every so often to thrust what appeared to be a small stick in the ground.

But what was he doing in Blower's field? And what was he measuring? A new stable? It seemed unlikely. Judging by the distances he covered, it was of largish dimensions, certainly much bigger than the shed, and appeared to occupy the center of the paddock. In other words, the area in a direct line from the Major's garden and drawing-room window.

As Major Rossiter stood watching, the man completed one side and turned in his direction, at which the Major beat a hasty retreat, dodging behind the rhododendrons, well out of the fellow's line of sight.

As a strategic withdrawal, it was briskly executed but still left the enemy, if he should be considered as such, in possession, literally, of the field. And Major Rossiter, although uncertain of the man's exact intentions, did not doubt for a moment that they boded ill for him in the long run.

It was equally obvious that the man's presence in the paddock was ultimately Blower's responsibility. After all, he owned it. Remembering Blower's bright little eyes and air of suppressed amusement, Major Rossiter was quite certain that some form of skullduggery was going on and that Blower was at the back of it.

It was a situation which could not be ignored. Despite his assertion that the ball was in Blower's court, Major Rossiter had the uncomfortable feeling that at some point during the past six weeks, when he hadn't been looking, Blower had lobbed it back at him.

There was only one way to find out: a direct confrontation with Blower. And on Monday morning, a plan of campaign carefully worked out in his mind, Major Rossiter drove onto the garage forecourt, where he was served petrol by Blower's son, Vernon, short of stature like his father but of a sullen rather than a jaunty temperament.

"Fill her up!" the Major told him in a loud, magnanimous voice, and when the tank was full he followed the young man into the office, where he had already noticed Blower senior ensconced at the

desk behind the dirty window, drinking tea from an enamel mug and filling in a form with an indelible pencil.

"Ah, Mr. Blower!" Major Rossiter exclaimed with cheery surprise, as if Blower was the last person he expected to encounter there. "How are things with you?"

"Not bad," Blower replied warily, as if uncertain how to react to the Major's mood. "Mustn't grumble."

"No, indeed we mustn't. After all, it's a beautiful day," the Major returned, waving an expansive hand towards the filthy glass, behind which the clear spring sunshine fell on petrol pumps and oil drums, perilous pillars of old tires and the rotting carcasses of cars.

He broke off as the sullen youth counted out his change, which he pocketed before nodding to the two Blowers and walking to the door where, as if suddenly reminded, he stopped short, his hand on the knob.

"Oh, by the way, Blower, I suppose you've not had any more thoughts about that bit of land, have you?" he inquired casually. Describing it that way was rather a good ploy, he thought. It struck the right offhand note, expressing a certain contempt for the property, thus diminishing its worth.

Blower rubbed a hand slowly across his chin.

"Well, now," he said, sounding uncharacteristically embarrassed, "I don't quite know how to put this, Major, but I'm up against a bit of a problem there."

"Oh, really?" Major Rossiter replied.

An innate sense of coming disaster made him refrain from saying more.

Blower took a deep breath before beginning.

"It's like this. I know you was round here asking about buying that field—when was it, six weeks ago? And like I said to you at the time, I might be interested if the price was right—"

"Get to the point, man," Major Rossiter interrupted impatiently. Good God, he was as bad as Phoebe, wittering on.

"Well, the point is, Major, since I spoke to you last I've had somebody else keen to buy it."

"The man who was there yesterday, measuring up?" Major Rossiter demanded—and immediately regretted having spoken. It had been his firm intention to say nothing about having seen the man. Not that Blower took any notice. Having launched into his account, he was not going to be diverted from it.

"—who's willing to pay the full asking price *and* put down a deposit

to show he means business. And that's even before he's sure he'll get planning permission, although I can't see him having too much trouble, building-land being scarce round here and him with five kids—"

"Planning permission for what?" Major Rossiter raised his voice, cutting across Blower's narrative.

"A four-bedroom house." Blower seemed surprised that the Major was ignorant of this fact. "Double garage. Through lounge. Paddling pool for the kiddies. He's got it all worked out. He did say paddling pool, didn't he, Vernon?" Mr. Blower broke off to appeal to his son, who was lounging against the till, picking at a filthy hangnail on his right thumb.

"Yeah, that's right," Vernon replied. "And a workshop. Does up racing cars as a hobby."

"There now," Blower said, beaming, as if gratified that his statement had been verified.

Major Rossiter felt himself trembling. It began in the calves of his legs and spread up his body to his chest, making breathing difficult.

Five children! A paddling pool! Racing cars! It was monstrous! His peace and privacy would be shattered. Not only that, the value of his property, on which he had spent a great deal of time and money, would be considerably diminished.

But it was the loss of the view which distressed him most. It was *his* view! No one had any right to build a four-bedroom house between him and it without asking his permission first—which, of course, he would never for a moment consider giving!

Almost without thinking, he found himself thrusting his hand into his inside pocket where he kept his checkbook:

"I'll buy the field," he said abruptly. "How much did you want? Two thousand, wasn't it?"

Blower's eyes lit up, but he made a deprecatory gesture with one hand.

"Sorry, Major, but I can't accept it. If it was up to me, I'd say yes like a shot. After all, your money's as good as the next man's. But I've already given first refusal to this other bloke, see, and taken his deposit. I don't like going back on my word."

His word! Major Rossiter thought. Good God above, the sniveling little scoundrel actually has the gall to talk about his word.

"Very well," he replied, letting his hand drop down by his side. "But I'd like to make it clear, Blower, that I have no intention of letting the matter rest there." Although as he said the words he had

no idea precisely what action he might take, the remark was nevertheless intended as a veiled threat.

Blower, however, whether out of obtuseness or tact, did not appear to recognize it as such. Smiling and almost bustling in his eagerness, he hurried forward to open the door. "I'll be in touch, Major Rossiter," he promised. "In the meantime, I'll have a word with this other bloke and see if something can't be worked out. After all, I feel if anyone ought to have that field, it should be you, seeing as it's right next door to your place."

"Thank you, Mr. Blower," Major Rossiter said stiffly, and, getting into the car, drove off.

His first action on returning home was to inspect the field at close quarters by climbing over the fence, pushing aside the horse as he did so. He was well aware that he was trespassing, but he was past caring about such legal niceties. He had to know exactly what he was up against. As in any battle, it is of primary importance to spy out the enemy's position before engaging in combat.

It was as he had feared. The little wooden pegs marked out a large area in the center of the paddock. Standing in the middle of it, he looked first to his left, where the slope of lawn and shrubbery rose gently towards the rear façade of Charmont Villa and the big rectangle of glass, glittering in the sun, which formed the picture window of his drawing room. Turning to his right, he surveyed the view, as bright and as clear in the gentle spring sunshine as if it had been newly created that morning.

Tender, he thought. That was the word he was looking for. *Tender*.

The stern winter outlines of the woods and hedgerows were faintly brushed over with green where the new leaves were breaking, while the river lay quiet, coiled up, as if asleep in its valley, silver-backed and motionless.

Looking at it, Major Rossiter felt himself trembling again—not with anger this time, but with a new passion he could not define. It was more than love. Certainly he had never experienced such a feeling for a woman. It was deeper than that—holier, if you like—similar to the frisson that ran through his blood whenever he heard his regimental band play their slow march. It was as if his whole soul went out to encompass that sweeping vista, cleansing his vision so that he saw it all, even the smallest detail, with a new clarity, and filling him with a powerful sense of purpose.

Oh, no, he thought, whacking his stick down onto the ground as

he walked away. He had no intention of giving in without a fight. The enemy was at the gates—no foreign foe this time but traitors from within—men like Blower, seedy little barbarians in dirty overalls who were prepared to sell their birthright, as well as other people's, for a couple of thousand pounds.

His solicitor, whom he consulted that afternoon, was not very helpful.

"Pity you didn't buy the field when it was first offered to you," he remarked. "As for the present situation, there's not a lot you can do. Once the paddock's sold, you can always object to planning permission being given."

"But would I win?" Major Rossiter demanded.

The solicitor looked doubtful. "That's a moot point. It would depend on how many other people raise objections."

Major Rossiter heard him out, although what he had to say was of little comfort to him. He could not even claim compensation for the damage the horse had done to his shrubs, the fence at the bottom of the garden being his responsibility, as the deeds, held by his solicitor, showed on examination.

As for organizing a protest, the Major realized it would be futile. As only his enjoyment of the view would be ruined, it was highly improbable that anyone else in the village would support him.

Not even the vicar, Major Rossiter thought gloomily.

So it was to be single combat between himself and Blower, and, for the moment at least, Blower, as owner of the field, had the advantage.

But he did not seem eager to use it, for, over the next few days, nothing happened. The Major kept the field under constant surveillance from the observation post he set up in the back bedroom, where, from its window, he had a clear view of the paddock through his binoculars.

It was on the following Sunday that there were the first signs of enemy action. Blower arrived, driving his battered little green van into the field. Having parked it, he caught the horse and led it into the shed, where its long mournful white face could be seen sticking out over the top half of the stable door. Blower then walked into the center of the paddock to inspect the pegs, strolling round their perimeter with his hands in his pockets and a jaunty look to the set of his shoulders.

Shortly afterwards, a second vehicle arrived—a large, flashy estate car. The greasy-haired man in the bright navy-blue suit got out and joined Blower in the center of the field, where the two men shook hands.

A trembling in his own hands made it difficult for Major Rossiter to focus the binoculars. They jiggled and shook, while behind the lenses his eyes misted over. Very carefully, he wiped his eyes before lifting the binoculars again, holding them steady by propping his elbows on the window sill.

He now had the two men in sharp focus. Blower was smiling that cocky, know-all, infuriating grin. The other man was smiling, too, as if well pleased.

It was quite clear to the Major that what he was witnessing was the final declaration of victory between the pair of them. The battle was over; the field was theirs.

But not quite! Major Rossiter thought grimly. In order for a victory to be complete, there had to be total surrender, and as far as he was concerned he had not yet shown the white flag.

Letting the binoculars drop down against his chest at the end of their strap, he rose to his feet.

It was Mrs. Rossiter's alarmed exclamations which drew the attention of the two men to the figure of the Major striding down the lawn towards them, clutching a shotgun and trying to fend off his wife as she ran beside him, crying out, "Please, George, I beg you, don't do anything foolish!"

"Out of my way, woman!" the Major was shouting.

He came to a halt in front of the rhododendrons, where he laid the gun across his forearm as Blower, still wearing that ingratiating smile, now a little fixed and nervous, came forward to meet him.

"Now, come on, Major Rossiter," he began in a voice of sweet reasonableness, "we don't want any bother, do we? Put the gun down and we'll talk business. If you want the field that badly, I'll sell it to you."

"How much?" the Major demanded.

Blower hesitated, glancing back over his shoulder to the other man as if confirming some secret pact between them.

When he turned back, his eyes were very bright as he fixed them on the Major.

"Shall we say two thousand five hundred, seeing as how there's another buyer in the market?"

What happened next was open to dispute.

At his trial, Major Rossiter stated that he raised the gun merely as a threatening gesture with no intention of pulling the trigger. It was his wife who, by grabbing it, caused it to go off, a statement with which Phoebe, almost incoherent, agreed.

Whatever the truth of the matter, the barrel swung upwards, the trigger was pulled, and Blower, still wearing the smile, staggered backwards, a large red hole suddenly springing up in the middle of his overall bib.

The sound of the shot echoed across the field, frightening the horse, which kicked and trampled inside the stable, adding its terrified neighs to the deafening reverberations.

Oddly enough, the Major observed, frowning as he concentrated his attention on the sprawled figure of Blower as it lay on the grass—such an insignificant little man even in death—the view remained unaltered. He had thought for a moment that the whole vista might come tumbling down, meadow and pasture, wood and river, shattered into pieces by the shock of the explosion, like a huge picture painted on glass.

But it remained untouched, serene in the spring sunshine. *Tender*, that was the word.

Somewhere on the periphery of his consciousness, he was aware of a woman screaming and a man's voice shouting, "You crazy fool! Look what you've done! You've shot my brother!"

"What's that you say?" Major Rossiter asked, drawing himself up to attention on the far side of the rhododendrons.

The man looked up as he knelt by the body.

"I told you! He's my brother! I wasn't going to buy the bloody field from him—we set it up between us to force up the price!"

"No house then?" the Major demanded.

The man shook his head and turned back to his dead brother, trying vainly to loosen the neck of his collar.

"Rather a waste of time," the Major commented, half to himself.

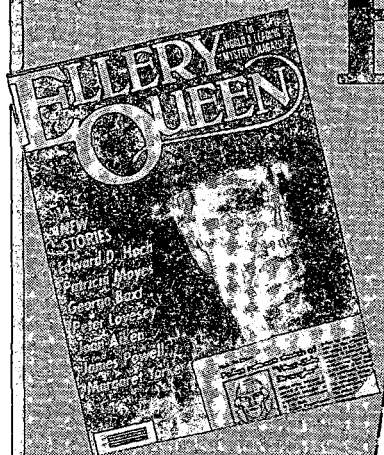
He meant not just the man's actions but the whole affair, his part in it as well as Blower's.

Dead ground, he thought. All that trouble to capture a piece of territory which was not in enemy hands in the first place.

But that was the irony as well as the futility of war.

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*Driscoll drew his chair out from the wall to about ten feet from the end of their long, polished table, where he could watch their faces and they could not help seeing his. He sat down, briefcase on the floor beside him and a copy of his own bestseller, the book they hated, on his lap: *The New Reality*, by A. Craddock Driscoll, Ph.D. . . .*

A story for 1984 from a highly valued contributor . . .

THE NEW REALITY

by **REGINALD BRETNOR**

Not one member of the President's Crisis Commission returned Driscoll's smile. Instead, they ignored him completely. That pleased him, for he had only smiled because all six of them were his enemies, and because he knew all the world was watching. He did not try to join them. He drew his chair out from the wall to about ten feet from the end of their long, polished table, where he could watch their faces and they could not help seeing his. He sat down, briefcase on the floor beside him and a copy of his own bestseller, the book they hated, on his lap: *The New Reality*, by A. Craddock Driscoll, Ph.D.

They could ignore him, just as they had ignored his theories and his carefully woven proofs ever since the book that proved them wrong was published. They could make sure that his viewpoint was not represented on the Commission. They had enough power for that, just as they had had the power to have him railroaded out of his Columbia professorship. But they could not keep the media from backing him, and the public who were his readers. Nor, he knew, could they stop him from bringing down their whole house of cards

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after they had finished. They would be unprepared, and the whole world was watching.

Driscoll was a spare, almost cadaverous man, just into middle age, just under middle height. He carried himself like a soldier, and he sat bolt-upright in his chair—very much, he thought, as a Civil War general might have sat his horse. He had a good profile, a strong profile, and he sat so that the watchers would not miss it, his eyes scanning the members of the panel, but pausing each time to concentrate on the Chairwoman, Madeleine Krenn-Jakob. They had been undergraduates together; they had been in graduate school at the same time; and from the very beginning, he had known that she—so slow, so painfully methodical—had envied him his brilliance. And of course the remarks he'd made about her had drifted back to her—that she was the finest third-rate mind in school, that sort of thing, remarks so barbed that they had always started his own friends snickering at the sight of her. She had pretended to ignore them, just as she was now ignoring him, but he had known better.

As a young woman, Madeleine Krenn had been attractive—not a beauty, but very fresh, a little plump, looking always deceptively vulnerable. She hadn't been. His own one or two ritual attempts at passes had been brushed off with polite contempt.

No, she had not been stupid. His own grade-point average and hers had been almost equal. Each had done well, she with her pedestrian plodding, he with his flashes of true genius. Each had gone directly from grad school to the faculty. The only trouble had been that she was always wrong. She had been wrong when they had published her crazy dissertation, *Ominous Aspects of the Socio-psychological Influence of Audio-Visual Media*, more than twenty years ago, when holograms were little more than laboratory curiosities. And she had been persistently wrong ever since. The difference was that now she was riding high, with both the academic and political worlds agreeing with her, and he—except for the media and the masses of the general public—was being dismissed as a crackpot.

He smiled to himself. It was hard to make a convincing crackpot out of a scholar whose latest book was a national bestseller, and who had become as well known to the holo public as Carl Sagan had to the video audiences of an earlier day.

There she sat, Chairwoman of the President's Crisis Commission. Quietly tailored, without makeup, without jewelry, she was heavier now, her dark hair greying perceptibly, and she looked sad and tired.

He could read her nervousness, her anxiety, in the tension of her neck muscles. She should be, he thought, with me sitting here. She would be no more able to stop him from delivering his unanswerable argument than she had been able to stop him from attending.

She was speaking, her voice soft and very weary. "You all know why we are here. We have reached a critical point in our history, in mankind's. We have recognized for a long time that we were approaching one, but we could neither agree on its nature nor decide what steps should be taken to contend with it. That is why the President, in this country, and the Prime Minister in England, and various other heads of state, each appointed a Crisis Commission a year ago. We exchanged data, and we have reached a unanimous decision. But before I announce it, if the others on the Commission do not mind, I'd like to outline the background for you once again so that there will be no misunderstanding."

She looked to left, to right, at Moylan and Greenspan of Harvard, Avolantis of U.C., Garfield of Loyola, Cheng of Stanford, men and women whom her faction considered the country's most eminent socio-psychologists. They nodded, looking as anxious and as tired as she.

"Very well, then. As you have all heard, the crisis we face is a simple and terrible one: sudden and almost universal insanity. Such things have happened on a much smaller scale more than once in man's history, when groups large and small have abruptly, and for no known reason, lost touch with reality. The Children's Crusade during the Middle Ages was such an occurrence. So was the terrible wave of witch-burnings, especially in Germany, some centuries later. So was the mass suicide of hundreds of Americans in Guyana almost in our own times.

"After much study, we have decided that in each instance the proximate cause was an event involving what Jung called the group subconscious, a realm of being we all share to some degree, and which we still cannot understand. That is the level, we now believe, where telepathic phenomena occur, especially those involving raw emotion—and whenever we find that disassociation from reality which defines psychosis, we always find raw emotion, frightening and powerful. Here we have the most probable explanation for what used to be called mass hysteria, mass hallucination, the madness of crowds."

What utter bullshit! Driscoll thought—but he said nothing. It was not yet time.

"Now," she continued, "let us go back to the early years of this century, when radio was the main medium of popular entertainment. Among the most addictive programs were what were called soap operas, crude tear-jerkers with devoted followings. Everyone was amused because whenever one of their characters was married, truckloads of gifts would arrive from listeners literally unable to distinguish the radio play from reality. Then later, when TV appeared, a new phenomenon occurred: viewers accustomed to excessive violence in their entertainment paid no attention when it happened in real life. Time after time, they'd watch the commission of a rape or murder and not even call the police. The term 'spectator crimes' was coined to describe this.

"Meanwhile, the behavior patterns shown on the media, the morals and ethics or the lack of them, or their distortion, were having their effect. It is no coincidence that, as the surrogate realities of TV became more violent and less restrained in all human relations, crime and every other form of anti-social, anti-personal behavior went up correspondingly. The *hardness* of reality was being diluted; the meaning of reality was being twisted. The ingredients for individual psychoses were already brewing, and with them, because of the emotional stress and turmoil involved, the ingredients for new mass psychoses."

Pausing, she pointed at a video screen above their heads. "The ingredients in our witches' cauldron have been simmering and bubbling and getting hotter and hotter as we've added to them. I'm going to let Dr. Cheng show you what our computers have told us about what's happened—"

Four dotted lines appeared one above the other in the screen's lower left corner: yellow, green, blue, and red.

"This display covers the pre-holo period only. You'll observe that, with an occasional minor dip, they all rise at increasing rates. The yellow line represents teenage and pre-teen self-destruction: drugs, psychotic violence, suicide. The green line shows the adult equivalent; the blue measures violent crime at all ages; the red diagrams the incidence of mass psychosis. You will observe that, towards the end, the red line starts to climb much faster than the others. Why did this happen? The answer's simple. The TV habit—and it was a habit, for the average set was on six or seven hours a day—not only weaned a great many people away from the real world, but the tube *became* their reality." She smiled bitterly. "But contrary to mass-media propaganda, this *new reality*—"

Driscoll's mouth twisted. Had she looked at him just as she said that?

"—this new reality was not a healthy one. Remember, too, that this was TV alone, before holo. Dr. Cheng, will you show us the comparison?"

Cheng touched the unobtrusive console in front of him and four new lines appeared, solid lines.

"Now you will see the effect of our twelve years of mass holo use. For twelve years, you have been watching men, women, and children suffering, bleeding, dying, outraging each other physically in a hundred different ways, all in your own family or living rooms, all virtually indistinguishable from the real and solid. You have seen their throats cut; you have leered at their orgasms; you have shared the fantastic thrills of risked lives at no peril to your own. Now watch!

"See how sharply each line soars past those older ones? Do you know what the red line shows us now? It shows us episodes like the one on that eight-hundred-passenger superjet, where suddenly, at thirty thousand feet, the passengers became a mob, a rabid mob, and tore the crew to pieces before the plane finished its last dreadful dive into the Andes."

Driscoll shook his head. Again he smiled, turning to make sure that every watcher saw him do it. His own book had refuted every one of her contentions. His chapter on "The New Dimensions of Reality" had shown definitely that the social phenomena she blamed on holo were cyclic, that indeed had it not been for holo and the new dimensions it opened to the mind things would have been infinitely worse.

He reviewed his other chapters: "Children in the New Reality," "Holo and the Healthy Mind," "The Empty Jungian Myth," and all the rest. She was persuasive—he had to give her that. She had persuaded her fellow academics, all but a few politicians, and now even more and more of the media men. She was the cause and root of all of it. Had it not been for her—

Well, her day was over. His turn had almost come.

Madeleine Krenn-Jakob gestured to Cheng to wipe the screen, and the lines vanished. "What you have seen has been our measurement of the cauldron's simmering, the cauldron that's the mass subconscious of mankind. Now look at what our computer extrapolations tell us. Not about the remote future, no! *About the next few weeks, or days, or hours!*"

A red line, jagged, sprang viciously to life. For a few inches, it angled upward—and then, abruptly, straightened and slashed its way straight up.

"Look!" she said. "It's a curve no longer. It has already reached asymptote. That means that we can count on no time at all until everything boils over!" She stopped, regarding her unseen watchers levelly.

"And that," she told them, "is why the Commission has already rendered its unanimous report to the President of the United States. That is why, as you may have noticed, all National Guard and Reserve units have been called to active duty, and all police reserve placed on instant alert. Even now, the President is issuing the necessary orders. There is only one thing we can do, and he is doing it. There will be no more holo transmissions. All holo installations will be shut down. And for the time being at least, television—or what's left of it—will be restricted to news and commentary."

Cheng cleared the screen. She stood.

"That is all," she said.

"*The hell it is!*" growled Driscoll, no longer smiling. He too stood up, letting his book fall to the floor, his right hand in his open briefcase.

Neither she nor the other members of the panel paid him any heed.

"This idiocy has gone far enough!" Driscoll's voice was loud and strident now. "Well, I have one argument you cannot counter, one that is going to stop this here and now!"

He saw that one of the Commission members—was it Garfield?—was making some sort of an announcement and that Madeleine Krenn-Jakob was listening closely.

"Damn you!" he shouted at her. "Damn you, look at me!" He let the briefcase drop so all could see the .45 automatic in his hand.

She paid him no attention. Nobody turned. Garfield, unbelievably, kept on with his announcement.

Coolly, he shot her through the head, and triumphantly he watched for her to fall.

She didn't. She seemed to be thanking Garfield for whatever it was that he had said.

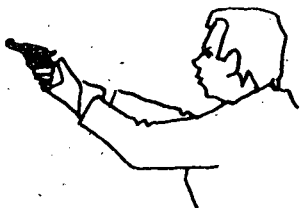
Driscoll stared at her, at all of them. He could feel every nerve screaming, every muscle straining against itself. Yet he couldn't have missed, not at that range, *never*. Or could he? Twice more he shot her, aiming for her body.

Then, desperately, he emptied the gun at Cheng, at Garfield, at the others.

And nothing happened.

Driscoll threw the empty pistol at them, cursing, screaming at them. "Damn you! Damn you! *Die!* Why can't you *die?*" Then he collapsed onto his chair, sobbing hideously, clawing at his face and forehead with his fingers.

Of course he could have turned them off at any time, but he had forgotten that.



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Benny Makahali of Waikiki's Zippy Tours decided not to wait any longer for the two lost souls. He still owed the pilgrims visits to the Alley Bazaar and Big Hips Makaloo's authentic make-believe Polynesian nightclub and smorgasbord palace . . .

HANG LOOSE

by ED CONROW

Me? I'm Benny Makahali of Zippy Tours. You want the islands, then I'm your boy. Book through Zippy and you get me. —Well, what did you expect? We're only a small outfit. King Louie Frangipani handles the paperwork and I play nursemaid to the tourists. Two years in the business and we're slowly starving to death, which makes me wonder sometimes why I gave up raising pineapples for this racket.

"Look, kid," I remember King Louie saying, "no sense breaking your back in the fields or the packing sheds. Go get yourself a couple of fancy shirts and white pants and we're in business." So I listened to his snow job and sold out my interest in the pineapple venture, then headed as fast as I could for the Ala Moana Shopping Center in downtown Waikiki. Got myself an eyeball-searing wardrobe of shirts all colors of the rainbow plus a half dozen white slacks and figured I was all set to go.

My money went faster than raindrops on a hot frying pan.

Next we needed a place to put out our shingle and King Louie finds us a hole in the wall in an alley next to Harvey's All Day Oriental Burger Palace. As usual, King Louie is flat broke and so I dip into my wallet for some rental advance, plus a couple of bills for hooking up a phone and the rest of the utility bit.

Then I find myself dealing with a fast-talking used-car-lot owner and now Zippy Tours has what used to be a school bus, complete with knife-shredded seats and loads of graffiti, sadly in need of a tuneup, new rubber, and a paint job. When everything is finished, we've got a green-and-yellow bus parked in the alley ready to go

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and the only money I've got left will just about cover a tankful of gas for the bus.

King Louie looks sharp in his red-and-white-flowered shirt, which is two sizes too small. Not to mention the orchid lei around his sweaty neck and ten pounds of seashell necklaces. He keeps sticking handbills into the fists of tourists like he was giving away ten-dollar bills. Finally, after four hot hours of this, we get eight bodies to board the bus. I slide behind the wheel and the metal monster takes off in a black cloud of smoke.

In the rearview mirror I catch a glimpse of King Louie giving me the thumbs-up sign. A few seconds later, he has disappeared from sight into Harveys for a cool brew.

Listen, man, three retired schoolteachers from Manatoosic Falls, which is somewhere between Rhode Island and New Hampshire, is not exactly a picnic, what with two of them correcting my grammar the whole trip and the third one so silently disapproving I wished she'd correct my grammar. The other five pilgrims consist of two mean-looking guys who look fresh out of a police lineup, a bleached blonde who pops gum like a runaway machinegun, and a snotty brat of a kid with his bored-looking mother.

Every time we stop for a red light, the kid leans out of his window and lets out wolf whistles at the beauties on the sidewalk. His mother finally slaps his ears a few times and he howls for a good half hour. Which of course gives me a throbbing headache by the time we make our first stop.

Stop number one is Waikiki Beach. I manage to park the heap on a side street and I tell everyone to hit the pavement. Pretty soon I'm at the head of the group with ukelele in hand and we're snaking through a well traveled alley off the main drag that leads to the beach.

There are lots of "oohs" and "aahs" as we step onto the sand and everyone grabs a glimpse of Diamond Head down the line. The beach is crowded and the sweet aroma of coconut suntan oil is in the air. There's a balmy breeze coming in from the ocean and it's nothing less than a beautiful day.

I break into a song about hula hands, coconut palms, and a tearful maiden standing by a grass shack looking seaward toward a reef, waiting for her lover who took off for the big island. Pretty soon, believe it or not, I've got an attentive audience.

Fifteen minutes more of strumming and singing and I need a cool

thirst-quencher, so I tell the pilgrims they have a half hour on their own and we meet back at the bus no later than 2:00 P.M.

"Got it?" I ask.

"We got it," yell the pilgrims. Everybody, that is, except the two mean-looking guys, who have their heads together and are focusing up the beach at one of the more expensive hotels. Naturally, the brat is ogling the beauties who lounge on the warm sand. He tells his mother he's happy where he is and no, he doesn't want a corn dog on a stick.

I give the pilgrims a wave of my right hand with only the thumb and pinkie sticking up and wiggling. On the islands this is the signal to "hang loose."

"I'll take you up on a cool one," the blonde suggests and so, what better way to spend a half hour, I give her my arm and off we trudge toward the nearest hotel.

Two piña coladas later, the world looks rosy.

"How long have you been on this gig, Benny?" asks the blonde, who has a shape like a pinup girl and a voice to match. Her name is Gloria O'Keefe.

"Since I got tired of breaking my back doing the pineapple bit," I tell her.

"You look like a macadamia-nut man to me."

"I needed a lot more bread for that. Besides, who wants to wait seven years for the first crop of nuts? And too many people are into macadamia nuts."

I look her over. We're sitting at a table under a striped awning with a gorgeous view of the ocean and are surrounded on three sides by magnificent hibiscus bushes fully loaded with giant red and yellow blossoms. I strum the ukelele and Gloria gets dreamy-eyed. She lifts the rim of her glass to her lips and takes a tiny sip. Her green eyes twinkle at me and then the bus brat's mother stumbles through a hibiscus bush and asks if we've seen her Rodney.

That breaks the bubble. A quick look at my wristwatch tells me the half hour is up. We lose another half hour scouring the beach for Rodney and finally one of the Manatoosic Falls ladies spots him hanging onto the side of a catamaran that's heading shoreward through a white-crested breaker.

I charge down the sand and plunge into the water before the catamaran beaches. Getting both arms around his waist and towing him out of the water, I turn him over to his mother, who slaps him around for giving her heart failure—and then I hear police sirens

over in the direction of the main drag. The sirens get louder and louder and finally cut out.

I count heads. I'm missing the two mean guys.

"We can't wait all day. Five more minutes and we cut out," I inform the pilgrims.

The drenched kid wastes no time letting us know that before he started hitching catamaran rides he saw the two guys ambling into the beachside entrance of the light-yellow-colored hotel. Which is the one and only, \$300-a-day-for-starters Majestic Hotel. Five minutes go by. Then ten. I decided not to wait any longer for the two lost souls. I still owe the pilgrims visits to the Alley Bazaar and Big Hips Makaloo's authentic make-believe Polynesian nightclub and smorgasbord palace.

Eat until you burst for \$5.95. That's what the sign over Big Hips' front door says.

So here I'm leading the group back up the alley, and on the main drag we see lots of P.D. vehicles, all with red lights flashing. Gloria hooks an arm into mine and I don't ignore it. Anything to keep a customer happy is my motto.

"What's up, Benny?" she asks.

"Who knows?"

Who knows turns out to be a jewelry-store heist over at the Majestic and the blue boy whose I.D. nametag identifies him as Tommy Bahinni fills us in as we arrive back at the Zippy Tours bus. "We're looking for some stickup men. They took the Islands jewelry shop over at the Majestic for some very expensive stuff."

As I enter the bus, who should I see seated in their seats but my two missing links. At this point I should let you know they signed up as Mr. Funigadora and Mr. Bombarini. From Chicago, no less.

"We took a short cut," mumbles Funigadora, who has a very much broken nose that compliments the two scars on the left side of his face.

"Yeah, we took a short cut," agrees Mr. Bombarini, who is all of five feet five and three hundred pounds and looks totally ridiculous in a garish shirt, straw hat, and too tight walking shorts.

Officer Bahinni sticks his head inside the bus and asks us once more if we saw anyone cutting out from the Majestic after the jewelry-store heist. I tell him we didn't even know a heist was going on. I give him the hang-loose signal and we take off for the Alley Bazaar . . .

The bazaar is about fifty businesses all lining one side of an alley about a couple of hundred yards away on the main drag. I find a place to park only because King Louie has seen fit to grease the palm of Mooki Nunez, who hustles bags at the Queen of the Islands Hotel opposite the bazaar stalls.

"One hour, my friends," I advise the pilgrims.

The three teachers take off, mumbling something about finding bargains in gold chains. One mentions she would rather have a banana daiquiri and I hear an "I'm with you, Stephanie." The gold chains are forgotten and the trio waltzes off to the nearest refreshment palace. Gloria disappears through the crowd and the Chicago boys waddle away, leaving only Rodney and his mother, who is preaching something fierce at him about how the sharks could have gotten him.

I head for a phone and after two tries I get King Louie.

I better explain that Louie is not King Louie Frangipani of Ha-waaiian royalty but better yet Louie Greenblatt from Brooklyn, New York. After two hitches in the military on the Islands, Louie decided he liked the easy life a whole lot better than subways, traffic jams, muggings, snow and ice, and so on. "What's new?" says Louie.

"We're doing the alley bit right now," I inform him.

"There was a jewelry heist over at the Majestic. A guy on the radio says they got a diamond watch over a hundred gees—"

"What's lined up for tomorrow?" I interrupt. "At the rate we're going, it's gonna be a short haul to the poorhouse."

"Benny, my lad, you are a pessimist. Already I've got twelve lost souls signed up for your trip to the cultural center tomorrow. We're on a big roll, Benny. Things are looking up."

Shortly after I hang up I hear sirens again. This time the wailing is coming from a big unmarked black car that does the tire-screeching act as it peels in from the street and blocks the main alley entrance.

Out of the heap comes some nut shouting for everyone to freeze. I hear a siren coming from the far end of the alley and right away figure the police are onto something and the alley is effectively blocked off.

A fat guy with coal-black hair and eyebrows as thick as a field of overgrown weeds comes over to me and shoves his I.D. under my nose. "Move back," he demands. "P.D."

I find a place to sit down on a curb and get myself out of the way.

The fat guy with the badge and at least a dozen other blue boys are making a search all through the bazaar. Then I hear shouting and cussing. A shop on wheels is overturned and seashells and coral necklaces spill out onto the pavement. People are hurtling out of the way—and then, racing toward me, if you can call it racing, are the two Chicago boys, closely followed by the law.

Nonchalantly, I stick out a foot and the chase comes to an abrupt end. Soon some people are pounding me on the back and telling me I'm a hero, while Funigadora and Bombarini are being led into the back seat of an unmarked P.D. car, their hands nicely cuffed behind their backs.

Then there's lots of pushing and shoving and a harried-looking runt is led through the crowd by a blue boy who looks meaner than a bulldog getting his toenails clipped. "This is Fuji Yakamōto, Lieutenant Mulligan," the blue boy says.

The fat guy with the overgrown weeds for eyebrows hustles Yakamoto up to the police car. He gives him a slight boost so he can feast his eyes on the frowning couple in the rear.

"It's them." Mr. Yakamoto nods and pulls away.

The lieutenant lets him go. "Book them," he says. "Take them in and book them."

The air is filled with an ear-splitting cacophony of sirens and the vehicles burn rubber on the pavement as they zoom off.

Eventually the crowd starts thinning out and the tourists drift back out onto the main drag in search of action. I start counting heads, and after a bit of bar-hopping I round up the teachers, who now have flushed faces and are a bit wobbly in the legs.

"I'm ready to eat a horse," one of them declares.

"Yeah—" chant the rest of the pilgrims, reminding me that our next stop is Big Hips Makaloo's chow hall.

We get into the bus. Rodney gets on last, holding tight to a small brown-paper bag. I tell him if he's bought firecrackers and intends to toss them out the bus windows he doesn't have too long for this world.

"A present for Mama," he sneers. He disappears into the back of the bus, stuffing the bag into a pocket of his slightly damp and wrinkled pants.

"Okay, pilgrims," I say, warming up the motor. "When we get to Big Hips' place you can eat until you drop, but just remember I don't have a stomach pump and I don't do the mouth-to-mouth bit to revive you." The teachers giggle and as I ease out into the flow of traffic

I peek into the rearview mirror and catch Gloria smiling at me. Who knows, I tell myself, maybe it won't be a totally wasted day, after all.

We're inside Big Hips' place, devouring chicken drumsticks and chicken wings with lots of sweet-and-sour sauce, plus bar-b-que'd ribs and at least a thousand other delicacies you'll never get to eat on the mainland. We're seated right up close to a stage and candles flicker on our table. The candles float in water in glass bowls that are filled with fragrant gardenia petals. All in all, it's a nice, romantic setting and I notice that Rodney has the paper bag in one hand and is fishing inside it with his other hand.

He gives his mother something and she peers at it in the semi-darkness. Then she reaches out for her offspring with a smile on her face. I stop chewing, figuring the brat is pulling some sort of a stunt. But Rodney's mother is hugging him and smothering him with sticky sweet-and-sour kisses.

"You're slobbering me," howls Rodney.

"What's up, Mrs. Waldingham?" inquires Gloria, who manages to look very ladylike as she bites into a sparerib. Mrs. Waldingham dabs at her eyes with a napkin and explains to us that Rodney has purchased a small gift for her in the Alley Bazaar to make up for riding the catamaran and nearly causing her apoplexy. Just then the drums start beating, softly at first and then increasing. The lights go down and Big Hips makes his entrance by hopping up onto the stage to give us his version of the fire dance.

With his beefy arm waving and fiery sword swinging, he resembles a large flaming shishkabob. He does two or three backflips and how the tub of lard keeps from torching his backside is a complete mystery to me. The drums beat faster and he twirls the flaming swords with all the agility of a high school drum-majorette. Big Hips has talent to spare, that's for sure.

I never see the finish of the act because I feel a hand on my shoulder and I turn to see Lieutenant Mulligan giving me the nod. I push my chair back just as everyone in the place breaks into loud applause. As usual, I have no way of knowing if the tourists love his act or are just plain glad he didn't burn the place down.

The lieutenant leads me out toward the entrance to the restaurant. "Something I gotta tell you," he says.

"Lay it on me," I tell him.

"Promise to keep your cool? Your bus—"

"The bus? What's wrong with the bus?" And then we're out on the sunny sidewalk and I can see very clearly what's wrong with the bus.

I let out a moan. Suddenly I don't feel too good. The bus is a disaster. Standing around on the sidewalk are a half dozen blue boys all looking sort of funny. One is closing the hasp of a pocketknife. The sidewalk and gutter are littered with pieces of foam rubber and vinyl from the bus seats. I make a run for the bus and hop the step. I stand in total amazement and horror as I eyeball the interior.

"We had to do it," says the lieutenant. "Officer Bahinni remembered seeing those two mugs sitting inside the bus when he was jawing with you in the alley."

"So who's going to pay for this disaster and what's it all about?"

"Send the city a bill." The lieutenant is real friendly. "To answer your second question, let me put it this way. When we grabbed the two mugs they didn't have the ice on them. I figured out that they must have either passed it on to a confederate or hidden it away on the bus." I can tell by the look on his face that the lieutenant has come up with a big, fat A-number one zilch.

He shrugs his shoulders.

"You mean you can't win them all?"

"You took the words right out of my mouth."

And just then the pilgrims start coming out of Big Hips' place and we hear their shrieks of disbelief.

"The poor, poor bus," says Gloria.

"Neat-o. But does this mean we have to walk back?" asks Rodney.

"I could go for another banana daiquiri," hiccups Stephanie, who has added two paper-umbrella swizzle sticks to her hairdo.

And then I notice something different about Rodney's mother. She is wearing a ring on a fat pinky—a big sparkler of a ring. The ring glows like a thousand Hawaiian sunsets.

"Is that the gift Rodney gave you?" I ask.

She nods. "Nice, isn't it? Rodney got it at a stall in the Alley Bazaar. Cost him only two dollars but I wouldn't take ten thousand—"

By now Lieutenant Mulligan is also staring at Mrs. Waldingham. "Would you take one hundred and twenty-five thousand?" he says. He motions to one of the blue boys closest to him and then with a wild leap he is all over Mrs. Waldingham, yelling, "Don't let her get away! She's got the rock!"

The sidewalk is now littered with rolling, tumbling, howling, scratching bodies. Not to mention, of course, piles and piles of debris from the seat cushions. Not even Big Hips could put on an act like this.

It's ten-thirty at night. King Louie and me are having a cup of steaming Kona coffee at Harvey's and comparing notes.

"Rough day, eh, Bennie?"

"Not one of my best—"

"What are we going to do about the bus? I've got twelve pilgrims signed and paid for a trip up to the cultural center tomorrow morning."

I hold up my cup and Harvey leans across the counter and splashes me a refill. I'm wondering just how many forms in triplicate I'll have to fill out so we can bill the city. "Mrs. Waldingham's talking about suing the city, talking about five million."

"Gad," says Louie, "that will break the treasury. They'll never have enough left to pay for the damage to the bus."

I take another sip of the heavenly Kona coffee.

Harvey, who hasn't heard it all, says, "How can she sue if she had the ring?"

"Because Rodney did buy the ring from a peddler in the alley. Funigadora and Bombarini had it on them until they heard the police cars pulling up to block the alley. What better place to ditch the 'Star of Waikiki' than in a display of costume jewelry? That's where the kid saw it and figured he'd buy it for his mother."

Harvey is impressed. He is also bleary-eyed.

Louie finishes his coffee with a flourish and slaps a big hand on the counter. "Come on, Bennie. Let's call it a day." I'm with Louie a thousand percent and so is Harvey. He mumbles something about flipping the light switches.

Outside, the alley is bathed in a soft, silvery moonlight glow. The scent of jasmine is in the air. Plus frangipani and you name what else.

"See you," says King Louie, walking off toward his car.

"Aloha, Louie," I mumble.

I head down the sidewalk toward a city bus stop. Tourists are still window-shopping. In Waikiki, tourists never sleep.

"Hey, Benny—what's the rush?" I turn and see Gloria walking toward me. She has an orchid in her hair and a pale-lavender-and-white-flowered islands dress makes her look like a million bucks.

"I got bored in the hotel room. I thought I'd take a stroll and do whatever mainland tourists do when they come to the islands."

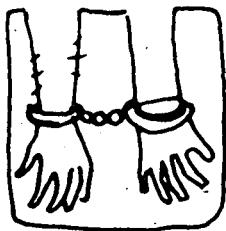
I take a good long look at her and it is a different Gloria. No gum-popping. Just a beautiful hunk of woman.

"Close your mouth, Bennie," she says, giving me a hang-loose wiggle with one hand.

Naturally I hang loose. And, as I am one of the best tour guides on the islands, I take Gloria by an arm. We head for the bus stop.

"You have a special tour in mind, Bennie?" The heady fragrance of jasmine and frangipani is more seductive than ever.

The bus is coming down the avenue. Together we make a run for it. After all, the day shouldn't be a total disaster, should it?



DETECTIVERSE

GENERATION GAP

by KATE DOLAN

There once was a clever young sleuth,
Who was missing a prominent tooth.
So when folks would query,
"Whodunit, McCleary?"
He'd say, "I'm still looking for cluth."

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The deserted sanitarium loomed ahead of the three doctors, replete with Victorian dormers, wood scrollwork, and cupolas. "Why don't you two look over the grounds while I give the interior a cursory examination?" Dr. Mindle suggested . . .

THE SECOND SHOT

by **JOHN LUTZ**

They drove from the funeral directly to the old sanitarium. Dr. Mindle sat in the back seat while his assistant, Dr. Raymond Xavier, and research director, Dr. Will Cleary, rode in front. Xavier was driving: it was his car, a five-year-old grey Plymouth with a small plastic skull dangling on a string from the rearview mirror. Dr. Xavier had a perverse sense of humor.

The funeral had been Dr. Carlson's—a psychiatrist who had served on the State Parole Advisory Board, of which Dr. Mindle was chairman. Carlson had drowned in his back-yard swimming pool, leaving a wife and three teenaged children. The tragedy had rocked the staff of Beachwood Sanitarium profoundly. Even in the limited time of his biweekly consultations, the affable Dr. Carlson had become quite popular with everyone at Beachwood. As managing director of the sanitarium, Dr. Mindle had arranged schedules so that as many of the staff as possible could attend the funeral.

"Are you sure you have the key?" Dr. Mindle asked Xavier.

Dr. Xavier's muscular shoulders shifted beneath his dark suit-coat as he half turned to glance back at Dr. Mindle. "Yes, sir. The real-estate agent gave it to me yesterday in town."

Mindle nodded, removed his glasses, and polished them with a massive white handkerchief. He replaced the thick spectacles, adjusted them with a tap of his forefinger to the bridge of his nose, and sat back to watch the lush green countryside glide past.

It wasn't Beachwood Sanitarium that they were driving toward. A few miles ahead of them, in a secluded area on a bluff overlooking a bend in the Missouri River, sat the deserted Lanvale Sanitarium.

Lanvale had been a small rest home that had failed two years

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ago. It was a converted Victorian mansion that had earlier served as a modest hotel. Space was becoming precious at Beachwood, so Dr. Mindle was considering recommending the purchase of Lanvale as an adjunct facility. Time was almost as precious as space at Beachwood, so he had decided to drive directly to Lanvale after the funeral with Xavier and Cleary so they could examine the building and grounds and be back at Beachwood by early afternoon for the repressed-rage symposium.

As the Plymouth bounced up the rutted side-road leading to Lanvale, Dr. Mindle leaned forward to peer through the windshield. The deserted sanitarium loomed ahead of them, replete with Victorian dormers, wood scrollwork, and cupolas. Not in such poor condition as Dr. Mindle had anticipated. Nor as large.

Dr. Xavier drove up the circular driveway and parked in front of the gallery porch. The three men climbed out of the car and stood looking up at the tall double doors with brass lion's-head knockers. Xavier towered over the smallish Cleary and Mindle. He was built like a fullback, which indeed he had been in college. Dr. Cleary, though not much over five feet tall, was broad and strong. Dr. Mindle was neither tall nor broad, an almost dainty man in tweeds, who moved with a slow and certain precision. If Dr. Mindle *had* ever played football, he would never have been caught out of position. Dr. Mindle had been captain of his college debating team. Xavier should have scored so many points.

"I suggest we go our separate ways and look the place over," Dr. Mindle said. "Then on the drive back to Beachwood, we can discuss our impressions."

Dr. Cleary nodded agreement, the late-morning sun highlighting his bushy red hair. Xavier hefted the key in his beefy right hand and stepped up onto the porch beaming his perpetual, disarming smile. His footfalls echoed on the enameled plank floor. "According to the agent," he said, unlocking the front door, "the electricity has been turned back on."

"Why don't you two look over the grounds while I give the interior a cursory examination," Dr. Mindle suggested.

He stepped inside, immediately found a toggle switch, and flipped it upward. The dim interior was abruptly exposed to the glare of the bright lights. There wasn't a stick of furniture in the place, but the condition of the floor and walls seemed sound. The boarded windows hadn't been tampered with by vandals and all of the fixtures that Dr. Mindle could see from where he stood were intact.

As Xavier and Cleary began a slow, appraising stroll around the front of the house he closed the door behind him and began walking from room to room, switching on lights as he went.

At the top of the wide stairway, he pushed open a door and entered the first of what had been patients' quarters. It was a small room, bare and in need of paint. Brilliant rays of sunlight lanced between the boards nailed to the outside frame of the only window. The light Mindle had switched on was a single low-wattage bulb inside a wire cage mounted in the center of the ceiling.

The room was minimal, Dr. Mindle decided, but it would do.

The click of the door latch made him turn. The door was closed and bolted. The man who had been concealed behind it when the doctor entered stood staring fixedly at him, cradling a double-barreled shotgun.

When Dr. Mindle's heart stopped racing, he concentrated on his observations. The man was medium-height and strong-looking. The impression of power he exuded was not so much the result of his size as it was of the tense, forward lean of his body. He was wearing a black T-shirt, faded jeans, and muddy boots. He might be a hunter, but it was the wrong time of year.

"Dr. Mindle," the man said, raising the twin barrels of the shotgun, "my name is Stanley Brandt."

The last name struck an ominous note in Dr. Mindle's mind. His dismay must have shown on his face.

"That's right," Brandt said, "I'm Marie Brandt's husband. The Marie Brandt who was brutalized and murdered in her bed by Arthur Taylor—tortured and killed by a vicious stranger who should still have been behind bars for the murder of his own sister, but who was on the loose because you set him free." Brandt's long drawn face became pale as bone, his haggard eyes burning and unblinking. "You and your board of so-called experts!" His voice caught with emotion. It was almost a sob.

Dr. Mindle had seen patients in Brandt's state of obsession. He knew that Brandt was capable of pulling the twin triggers. It was a twelve-gauge shotgun, holding two rounds. Two shots. Sure death from either barrel at this close range. The doctor had two sincere objectives: he wanted to help Stanley Brandt, and he wanted to survive.

He attempted to reason with Brandt, though he knew that was a contradiction in terms. Brandt was far beyond reason, in the shad-

owed primal depths of the mind, acting on his compulsion for vengeance. Dr. Mindle needed to play for time. Xavier and Cleary were outside. Help was nearby.

"How did you know I was coming here?" he asked.

Brandt grinned cadaverously, a caricature of a smile. "I've been watching you. I knew you were interested in buying this place and that your assistant picked up the key at the realtor's office yesterday. I pretended to be interested in the property and the agent told me you planned on returning the key this afternoon. It was logical that you'd come here after Dr. Carlson's funeral. So you see, killing him served two purposes. It exterminated him, and his funeral provided a time frame for your arrival here. I simply came here an hour ago, let myself in by forcing a basement window, made my way up here, and waited."

Dr. Mindle felt a cold weight drop through him. "You killed Doctor Carlson?"

"Of course. *And Dr. Mathers and Dr. Eustice.* All within the past three days. Mathers' and Eustice's bodies haven't been discovered yet. I planned it that way, so I'd have time to finish off everyone on the psychiatric board who recommended setting Taylor free. You're the last of them, Dr. Mindle, and after I use this shotgun to kill you, I'll use it on myself. I can put the barrel in my mouth and easily reach the trigger. It will be all over and no one will be able to touch me for what I've done. I'll be as free as Taylor." He laughed violently, but the twin barrels of the shotgun remained steady, aimed at Dr. Mindle's stomach. "Isn't that justice, Doctor?"

"No," Mindle said. "Justice was granting Arthur Taylor his parole."

Brandt was thrown. His eyes widened in surprise. "Why, you're as insane as Taylor!"

Dr. Mindle shook his head in disagreement. He removed his glasses and polished them with his large handkerchief, the reflection of the sunlight through the cracks in the boarded-up window glinting off the thick lenses. A spot of brightness played like a whimsical spirit on the bare wall.

"Arthur Taylor murdered his sister thirty years ago," he said. "He had been a model prisoner. Every psychological test indicated that he would never kill again. The tests aren't perfect. We can be wrong. We were wrong in Taylor's case. But society can't storehouse people for decades without taking a chance on them eventually. It would be inhumane."

"What Taylor did to my wife was inhumane."

"I agree. It was tragic and reprehensible. You have my pity and deepest regret, Mr. Brandt, though I know it means nothing to you in your present state of mind. A terrible mistake in judgment was made. Your wife paid for it." Dr. Mindle replaced his glasses and returned the handkerchief to his pocket. "I can only be sorry."

"Wrong," Brandt said in a flat voice. "You can be dead."

"Carlson and Mathers and Eustice are dead," Dr. Mindle said. "And your wife is still dead. The men you killed had families that will grieve as painfully as you grieve the loss of your wife. You've only made a terrible thing worse, Mr. Brandt. Don't continue to do so by taking two more lives, no matter how much you yearn to kill, and to die."

Brandt bared yellowish teeth in a skeletal grin. "I do believe you're begging, Doctor."

"No, I'm imploring. For both of us."

"The way you implored the parole board to turn Taylor loose on society?"

"There is an element of self-destructiveness in most murderers," Dr. Mindle explained. "When they kill, they are, in a metaphorical sense, slaying a part of themselves. That self-destructiveness which had been in Taylor's makeup seemed to have disappeared. Regardless of what you say and of what happened, Taylor deserved a second chance. No system is perfect."

"I'm unimpressed."

"Dr. Mindle?"

It was Xavier's voice, from outside in the hall. Brandt's wild eyes shifted to the door and back to his prey.

"Where are you, Dr. Mindle?"

"Don't answer!" Brandt cautioned.

Dr. Mindle removed his glasses again. He tilted the lenses and aimed the bright spot of reflected sunlight at Brandt, letting it rest just below his throat, and began once more to buff them with his handkerchief.

"Dr. Mindle?" Xavier's voice was closer, becoming concerned.

Theirs was the only closed door in the hall and so it must have drawn Xavier's attention. The doorknob twisted and turned and sudden loud knocking exploded the quiet of the small room.

Brandt's eyes darted toward the sound. At that moment Mindle aimed the bright reflection from his thick lenses directly into

Brandt's eyes. When Brandt's gaze swung back toward the doctor, he was startled by the brilliance, temporarily blinded.

Dr. Mindle moved with surprising quickness. He stopped to the side and wrested the shotgun from the stunned Brandt. The roar was deafening, and Dr. Mindle felt the rush of the heavy buckshot flying past him to embed itself in the wall instead of in flesh and bone. The room hummed with the shot's reverberation,

"Dr. Mindle!"

Two voices now. Xavier and Cleary were flinging themselves at the door.

Dr. Mindle leveled the shotgun at Brandt.

Brandt only smiled. "I'm a much larger man than you are, Doctor. And I don't think you can bring yourself to pull the trigger. I'm going to take the shotgun away from you, and I'm going to kill you. It's you or me."

Dr. Mindle, appraiser of men, studied Brandt's narrowed eyes. "Yes," he said, "I believe it is."

The crashing at the door became louder. Time was running out. Brandt flexed his knees, coiled his body to pounce.

Then, to his astonishment, Dr. Mindle handed him the shotgun.

Mindle stepped back and stood with his hands at his sides. "You're right," he said softly, "I can't pull the trigger. There is one shot left and very little time. Now we'll see which you yearn for the most, Mr. Brandt. Vengeance? Or death? To which are you the most committed? In which direction will you swing the barrel of the gun?"

The crash of the splintered door flying open was simultaneous with the roar of the second shot.

The State Patrol arrived at Lanvale ten minutes after Dr. Cleary phoned them from a service station on the highway. When they got there, they found Dr. Xavier standing over Stanley Brandt, who was slumped in a corner with his head bowed, hugging his drawn-up knees.

"You took quite a chance," the patrol sergeant said to Dr. Mindle after he'd heard what happened.

"I felt sure that if forced to choose between revenge and escape into death, Brandt would decide on the latter," Dr. Mindle said. "I was surprised when his resolve broke, and he pulled the shotgun away from his head at the last moment and fired the final shot into the ceiling."

"You must have impressed him with the courage of your convictions," the sergeant observed wryly. "You were lucky."

"So was Stanley Brandt, if luck was a factor."

Dr. Mindle watched them lead Brandt away. Possibly Brandt could be helped, and might even eventually benefit from the same quality of mercy that had granted Arthur Taylor a second chance. Dr. Mindle hoped so. At least something might be salvaged from this tragedy of the system gone wrong.

He had fully expected Stanley Brandt to kill himself there in that tiny, locked room. Though Dr. Mindle's decision to return the shotgun to Brandt had been correct, the result had been unforeseen. For the second time in six months, he had misjudged his man. But this time he was glad.



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Shardlow was a man with a grievance—and it was becoming an obsession . . .

JUSTICE AND SERGEANT SHARDLOW

by IAN STUART

Jack Webster held his glass up to the light and studied the beer in it morosely. "It's cloudy," he said. "I don't know why we come here."

I did. It was convenient, and after a superintendents' meeting nobody was inclined to walk past the nearest pub. This afternoon's agenda had taken three hours and been as unproductive of anything except platitudes and pious resolutions as most of the others I had attended these last three years.

"There was another chap in the Force," he said, reverting to his previous topic. "A detective-sergeant. Left a bit sudden. Lord, how time flies—it must be twenty years ago."

"Shardlow," I told him. It was strange how I was still reluctant to talk about him even after all this time. And it was nearly twenty-five years, not twenty. A quarter of a century!

"Shardlow!" Webster repeated, as triumphantly as if he had remembered himself. "That's him! I never did know what happened. Do you?"

"There was trouble over some evidence," I said.

"Planted, you mean?"

"It could have been."

I had difficulty sometimes remembering what old friends had looked like, but I could recall Shardlow's unprepossessing features as clearly as if I had seen him a few hours ago. Detective-sergeant Cedric Shardlow. Perhaps a psychologist would have found a link between his Christian name, strangely unfitting his aggressive character and his bully-boy ways. But I knew plenty of men with worse crosses to bear who hadn't turned out like Shardlow.

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Also, I didn't want to find excuses for him.

I was twenty, and a good deal softer and more naive than I realized, when they attached me to the CID. At school, I had been middle of the road in everything, comfortably in the ruck, and eighteen months in the Force hadn't hardened me much. In those days, when most people were generally peaceable and law-abiding and even crime was rarely vicious, not much happened in small villages to put a fine tough skin on young coppers.

Ours wasn't a big station and Shardlow *was* the CID. Or rather, he and I were. We made such an ill-matched pair, the local villains must have laughed themselves into knots behind our backs. Shardlow, rough and tough and not overscrupulous about his methods, and me, tall and skinny and still wet behind the ears.

"Aw, no!" he moaned the first morning I reported to him. "They're taking on bloody school kids!"

After that, he usually referred to me as "sonny" or "the kid." He despised me and went out of his way to show his contempt in a hundred little ways. I was humiliated and embittered and it didn't help much telling myself I had more brains than he had and that if I stuck it out I would probably go much further in the police. Instead, I nursed my resentment like a woman to whom motherhood has come unexpectedly and late, cossetting her first born. At bad moments I took it out and cherished it.

Shardlow wasn't tall, but he was heavily built, and too many hours spent in pubs "picking up the talk," as he called it, had given him the beginnings of a belly. He was thirty-seven then, with short sandy hair thinning on top and hot-looking eyes. He fancied himself with women—God help his wife, he affected to despise her as much as he did me—and they liked him. Or a certain type of woman did. I was going around with a quiet girl from the bank named Iris and it provided fuel for the fires of his humor.

"Had your hand on it then, have you?" he demanded more than once. He probably guessed we had never got beyond a clumsy kiss and cuddle and he shouted with laughter at his own wit.

He jeered at my work, too. I didn't see it at the time, but I think he may have resented my having gone to a grammar school, even though I left when I was sixteen. He referred to it often.

Like most of his kind, at times his manner was almost servile, even with me, and then you could see how desperately he wanted to be popular. And there were people, not only oversexed women,

who were deceived by his bluff, rough ways and took him at face value.

The bane of Shardlow's existence was two youths named Reg Davies and Colin Lawrence. They were both nineteen, lived in the same housing complex, and never stayed in any job longer than a few months. They were layabouts rather than hardened criminals, but if any petty crime was committed in the town, half the population immediately assumed they were the culprits. And probably most of the time they were right. Nevertheless, apart from convictions for taking away a car without the owner's consent two years before, which had resulted in their being put on probation, they had never been charged with anything. Knowing they were guilty was one thing, but Shardlow had never been able to prove it and it rankled him.

One evening about three months after I joined the CID, we went to the White Lion for a drink and to hear the gossip. Whether Shardlow ever heard anything useful in the course of his visits to pubs, I doubted. I was beginning to suspect he enjoyed the mixture of suspicion, dislike, and guarded respect he attracted. The Lion was a squalidly unattractive beer house in a back street near the market. It had a single bar and was furnished with plastic-topped tables, uncomfortable chairs, and a jukebox. It was also Davies' and Lawrence's favorite haunt, but whether that was why Shardlow chose it that day I don't know. If so, he couldn't have foreseen the consequences.

When we walked in soon after eight-thirty, the bar was half full and the jukebox was blasting out a rock-and-roll number. The two young tearaways were sitting at a table near the counter, lolling on the bases of their spines, their oily hair combed up in black shocks and their legs crossed to reveal the thick crepe-rubber soles of their shoes below their drainpipe trousers.

The record ended and the silence that followed was almost startling. Into it a voice behind us said rudely, "Look what the wind's blown in."

I might not have learned much about police work, but I knew enough not to turn around. Or maybe it was cowardice, the knowledge that a confrontation would achieve nothing and all the trumps were held by the other side. Whatever the constraints for me, they didn't exist for Shardlow. He turned slowly and I could sense the anger surging up in him.

"What did you say?" he demanded.

"Say?" I could look now. It was Davies. Jeering innocence.

"That's what I said," Shardlow grated.

"You said? I thought it was somebody else said it."

Lawrence laughed loudly at his friend's taunt, pretending to roll helplessly in his chair. For a moment I thought Shardlow was going to wade into them both.

"If you little crooks—" he began violently.

"Naughty, naughty."

"That's libel, Colin. You 'eard what he called us. Crooks."

"Sright. We'll get our lawyer to take 'im ter court, eh? 'Ow about that?"

This time they both laughed. The other customers were watching enthralled, hoping Shardlow would start a scrap. I didn't doubt most of their sympathies were with the two youths.

The landlord was looking worried. He didn't want a fight in his pub, especially one involving two policemen. "Come on, come on," he muttered. "We don't want no trouble 'ere."

Shardlow turned on him. "You'll get it while you let scum like that in," he said viciously. Then, without a word to me, he strode out of the pub.

I hurried after him, jeers and laughter ringing in my ears. He was standing outside on the pavement, swearing fluently. One thing Shardlow couldn't stand was being laughed at, and he knew Davies and Lawrence had made him look a fool.

Usually, I arrived first in the mornings, but when I reached the CID room the next day Shardlow was already on the telephone. I saw his expression and shuddered inwardly. He was simmering, ready to boil over at any moment, and I reckoned I could count on another wretched day.

"All right," he said loudly. "We'll be around in five minutes." He put the receiver down so that it rattled on the rest. "The bloody little—"

I had learned that when he was in his present mood it was best to ignore him as far as possible and I got on with my own work, completing one of the reports County Headquarters sent out in an unending stream.

"They did Fenton's last night," Shardlow snarled.

"Who did, sarge?" He hated being called "sergeant" by anybody in the CID, expected it from the uniformed branch.

"Who the hell d'you think? Those bloody clowns. Lawrence and Davies."

No wonder he was furious, I thought. Fenton's was the biggest jeweler's in the village, and for them to break in there so soon after taunting him in the White Lion was adding insult to injury. I wondered how much they had got away with.

Few business premises were fitted with alarm systems in those days, and old Fenton's security was limited to locks on the two doors and grilles he or one of his staff pulled down over the windows and the front door before they left. So far they had been adequate, but now a thief or thieves had gotten in through a window at the back. It was the first robbery Fenton had suffered and he didn't even lock his old-fashioned safe at night; the key had been lost years before and he had never bothered to replace it.

I can't remember now if it occurred to me to ask Shardlow how he knew his tormentors were the burglars. *If it did.*

"Come on," he growled.

It was only a couple of hundred yards to the jeweler's and we walked. Shardlow brushed past people, nearly knocking one elderly man into the gutter, although, to be fair, I doubt if he even saw him. His mind was full of dreams of revenge.

We spent most of that morning at the shop. While Shardlow looked around, I took statements from the old man and his two women assistants. The photographer and the fingerprint expert came from Divisional HQ, did their work, and departed.

When I had finished taking down the statements, Shardlow sent me to question the people in the neighboring shops, most of whom lived in the flats over them. PC Rogers came to lend me a hand. I liked Fred Rogers. He had been transferred from a bigger town four or five weeks before, a quiet middle-aged man who, although he didn't say much, gave an impression of trustworthiness and good sense. I felt he sympathized with my sufferings at Shardlow's hands and I suspected he had little use for him. Fred was what I thought of as one of the old school, straight as a die, lacking much imagination, but reliable. The sort of policeman who helped old ladies across the road. The way he treated me as an equal restored some of my confidence after bad days with the sergeant.

We interviewed at least a score of people between us, but none of them had seen or heard anything suspicious. When I returned to the shop, Fenton was making a list of the items that had been taken.

The total value was several hundred pounds, mostly watches, rings, and a few necklaces.

The more I thought about it, the more I began to wonder if Davies and Lawrence really were the thieves. The back window had been forced skilfully, not broken, and the burglar or burglars had had sufficient knowledge to take only the best, most easily saleable pieces and left everything tidy. That didn't seem to me like the work of ignorant layabouts. But I had the sense to keep the thought to myself.

Shardlow's mood was worsening by the hour. He was convinced Davies and Lawrence were guilty and believed they had done it deliberately to thumb their noses at him. Now they would be laughing their greasy heads off. He was a man with a grievance—and it was becoming an obsession.

In the end, we returned to the station. We had no evidence and knew little more than we had done when we arrived at the shop. While I got on with the report for HQ, Shardlow sat at his desk brooding. Then, just before one o'clock, he growled that we'd better get something to eat.

The lavatory was at the end of the narrow, badly lit corridor that ran past the CID office and Shardlow took off his jacket to wash his hands, draping it over an old table just inside the door. I did the same, but in the process I disturbed his and it slid to the floor. Seeing what had happened, he turned and picked it up before I had time to, putting it on, although he hadn't dried his hands.

"You clumsy oaf!" he bellowed.

I was taken aback. It was unusual even for him to lose his temper over anything so trivial. Those two louts had really got under his skin, I thought.

I had arranged to meet Iris at the café across the street from the bank, and we ate a hurried meal of shepherd's pie and cabbage, and jam tart and custard. When I got back to the station, I met Shardlow coming out.

"Where the hell have you been?" he demanded. "Come on, we're going to see that bastard Lawrence."

Lawrence had recently started work with a building firm and I wondered if he would be at home at twenty to two on a weekday afternoon. I should have remembered that the sergeant knew almost all there was to know about him and Davies, including the fact that

he was currently working on a job at one of the local schools and went home for dinner every day.

We walked across the yard to Shardlow's shabby Austin and I climbed in beside him. There was a good deal of litter on the front passenger seat and he swept it onto the shelf under the dashboard, adding to the collection already there.

"Fred Rogers is meeting us at the house," he volunteered, starting the engine and sounding a bit more cheerful. It struck me he was keyed up and I guessed he was looking forward to confronting Lawrence.

We drove along the High Street and turned into a wider road, then again into the housing complex. It was late October and there was a thin mist—just enough to soften the ugly monotony of the houses. Smoke drifted up from some of the chimneys, hanging in the damp air. A group of little girls enjoying their half-term holiday had drawn crude squares in chalk on the pitted asphalt of the pavement and were playing hopscotch.

Lawrence lived with his widowed mother at Number 22, but she worked at a shop in the village and didn't come home in the middle of the day. Perhaps Shardlow was counting on that.

He pulled up behind a battered old Ford outside the house. "His car," he said.

We got out. I saw Fred Rogers pedaling up on his bike and waited while he dismounted and leaned it against the front hedge. Shardlow had gone on ahead.

"I don't think they did it," I muttered.

Fred gave me a strange look. "Don't you?" He glanced at the sergeant's retreating back. "He means to do them for it whether they did or not."

Walking up the short path to the front door, past the neglected square of lawn and the flower bed with its brown, dead plants, the damp seemed to seep into my bones.

Lawrence answered the bell. He was the less cocksure of the two and it was clear that without Davies he was nervous, although he did his best to hide the fact behind a show of bravado.

"Well, well," he said, eying us uncertainly. "Look oo's 'ere."

"We're coming in to have a little chat with you," Shardlow told him.

"An' what if I won't let you in?"

"But you will, won't you? You're going to ask us nice and polite. Right?"

Shardlow moved forward. He was at least three stones heavier than Lawrence and the boy backed away from him, looking scared.

"Come on," Shardlow said impatiently to Rogers and me and urging Lawrence backward into the living room. "Keep an eye on him."

He went out. I heard his footsteps on the thinly carpeted stairs, then moving about overhead, and guessed he was looking to make sure there was nobody else in the house.

He was gone only two or three minutes, and when he returned he planted himself on the hearthrug in front of Lawrence. "All right," he said. "You know why we're here."

"Ow can I know? You 'aven't told me," the boy protested.

"Because you and your mate Davies broke into Fenton's last night and you've been expecting us."

Lawrence stared at him. "You're off your bleeding rocker. I didn't know anybody'd done Fenton's."

Shardlow took a menacing step nearer. "Don't you talk to me like that, you little rat. You're going to invite us to look around, aren't you?"

"Do I 'ave any choice?"

"Not much." Shardlow turned to Rogers and me. "All right, you know what you're looking for."

I have searched enough rooms since then to become reconciled to going through other people's cupboards and drawers, turning over their clothing and personal possessions. I can be detached about it. But that was the first time and it embarrassed me.

We went through the whole house with a fine-tooth comb and we found nothing. I don't know whether I was disappointed or glad. I knew our failure to find what he had expected us to would put Shardlow in a worse mood than ever, but I could take a perverse pleasure in his disappointment.

When we reentered the living room, Lawrence was slumped in a chair. Shardlow was gazing out of the window.

"Nothing there," Rogers reported.

Shardlow looked at him as if he couldn't believe what he heard. "What d'you mean, *nothing*?" he demanded.

"We made a thorough search, but we found no watches or jewelry."

"They're there! I know they're there! You bloody fools, you didn't look!"

We said nothing. What did we do now? I wondered. More to the point, what would Shardlow do? He looked like a man falling through a manhole in the pavement, staring at Rogers, then at me.

I wanted to laugh at the shock and disbelief on his face. He was never a man to conceal his feelings.

"We'll look in his car," Rogers said.

I thought Shardlow was going to say no, but instead he turned back to Lawrence. As I followed Rogers out of the room, I heard him say, "All right now, let's have the bloody truth."

The front door had blown shut before I got to it. I opened it and stepped out into the chilly mist. The kids were still playing on the pavement outside Number 28, the little girls squealing joyfully. Rogers had reached the car and was opening the driver's door. For a second I watched him, too startled to say anything. Then I started down the path, shouting to him.

He seemed not to hear me. As I reached him, he was leaning inside, rummaging under the dashboard. The next minute he stepped back, still bent double, withdrawing his head and shoulders from the car. When he straightened up, he didn't say anything, just held out his right hand. There was no sun but the diamonds he was holding glittered.

"Oh, God!" I breathed. I felt sick and half afraid.

"These will do it," Rogers said.

I could only nod speechlessly.

"What is it?"

"That's Shardlow's car," I told him.

Our eyes met. His held an expression I hadn't seen there before. "Is it?" he asked.

Shardlow swore he knew nothing about the jewelry, that somehow Lawrence or Davies must have planted it in his car to frame him. An inspector came from Divisional HQ to take over the Fenton case and he soon established that it was very unlikely either of them had had anything to do with the burglary. But if they hadn't, they couldn't have had the jewelry to put in Shardlow's car, and even he couldn't suggest anyone else who hated him enough to do that.

I don't know what it was made me suspect the truth. Perhaps it was the look I had seen in Fred Rogers' eyes when I told him I didn't believe the two layabouts had broken into Fenton's and he had said Shardlow meant to do them for it anyway. Or when I told him the car in which he had found the pieces was Shardlow's. He had known all the time. He had been at the station a month and he was a good copper. He kept his eyes open.

Shardlow had convinced himself Lawrence and Davies were

guilty. He really believed it and he was more eager than ever to prove it after the incident in the White Lion the previous evening, but he was afraid he would fail. At the shop he had examined the trays before Mr. Fenton checked them to see what had been taken. His back was toward us and, in any case, we were busy with our own tasks. It would have been simple for him to slip two or three pieces into his pocket. That was why he had been worried when I knocked his jacket off the table—he had been afraid they might fall out.

I was pretty sure Lawrence had been telling the truth when he said he hadn't known about the robbery. Shardlow had gone into the other rooms alone when surely the natural thing would have been for him to send Rogers or me to make sure there was nobody else in the house. But if he had sent us, he wouldn't have had the opportunity to plant the jewelry under the pillow or wherever Rogers had found it—and removed it, and "discovered" it later in Shardlow's car.

Why? I could understand Shardlow trying to frame Lawrence and, indirectly, Davies, but Fred Rogers was as straight as they came. He must have hated Shardlow and everything he stood for. Like me, he was pretty sure the two youths were innocent, and when he found the stones he guessed what Shardlow had done. It must have seemed poetic justice to him to plant the evidence on the man who had planted it on someone else.

By the time I worked it all out, Shardlow had gone. There was sufficient doubt for them to allow him to resign quietly and he wasn't charged. What would I have done if they hadn't? I've never been able to decide. I hated him and, after all, I had no proof. Moreover, I was a very junior constable—who would listen to me? But if anyone did, Rogers' career would be finished and he might go to prison. I liked him and still respected him, I didn't want to be responsible for that.

Nevertheless, he had falsified the evidence just as much as Shardlow had tried to do. Was he then as much to be blamed? Could one wrong justify another? Even now, a quarter of a century later, I still didn't know.

“Q”

a **NEW** Hollywood ad man story by

RON GOULART

In Twentieth Century Crime and Mystery Writers, Ron Goulart comments: "The fact that I am, to the best of my knowledge, the only writer ever to win a Mystery Writers of America award for a science fiction novel [After, Things Fell Apart, Avon, 1970] indicates my dual fascination with both detective stories and fantasies. I had the good fortune to study with Anthony Boucher in my youth, and he also practiced in both genres and sometimes mixed them. It isn't only the opportunity to construct puzzles and extrapolations which drew me to these two areas. I also discovered quite early that both fields allowed you to be funny. This is important to me and I plan to keep mixing murder, bugeyed mōnsters, and satire for as long as I can get away with it."

There's no element of science fiction in the following yarn, just a heady sample of Goulart extrapolation . . .

ALAS, MY LOVE

by **RON GOULART**

Lee couldn't think of much to say to the police. Because by the time they grabbed him, he was pretty certain he'd killed the wrong person. That made it difficult to claim what he'd done was justifiable homicide.

So he kept quiet and let them book him for murder. Maybe he and his attorney can work out something for him to say.

Meantime, all sorts of stories and rumors have started circulating, some of them even more interesting than the truth. Not that I'm completely certain myself what the truth is in this case. I know as much, or maybe a bit more, than poor Lee Branner did. But even

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if I knew everything, I'm not going to get involved in this mess. Lee really did commit a murder after all.

When he first mentioned *Alas, My Love* to me, he was feeling completely positive about the book, nearly euphoric.

We were jogging side by side along an early-morning stretch of Southern California beach and I'd remarked on the new maroon running suit he was decked out in.

"What?" He was a tall, lanky man, sunbrowned and nearly thirty-six. "I didn't catch your remark over that godawful wheeze of yours."

"Warmup suit," I gasped. "Yours. New?" I'd only started daily running earlier in the month and after a half mile I did sometimes develop a mild wheeze.

"You're wondering," said Lee, grinning and breathing evenly, "how a washed-up TV hack writer like me can afford underwear, let alone a three-hundred-dollar—"

"You got," I inquired, "a new writing assignment?"

"Seems incredible to you, doesn't it? Lee Branner, six-time Emmy runner-up. Head writer on such dramatic hits of past seasons as *Hula Cops*, *Wuthering Heights Revisited*, and many more. You were sure I was on the skids for good."

"Never thought one way or the other. Noted sweatpants no longer full of holes. Congratulations."

"Through it all," he said, never once breaking his easy sandpounding stride, "only one person stuck by me and continued to believe in me. That was Emily, the most loyal wife a man could—"

"What's the assignment?" I rasped.

"You sound godawful, sport." He slowed, halted beside a large sprawled hunk of driftwood. "Better rest for a spell, huh?"

"Doctor says—" I shook my head—"do mile morning before work." I'd stopped next to him, panting. "Good for heart."

"But cardiac arrest won't be good for your heart at all." Lee nodded at the log. "Sit a spell and I'll fill you in on how I'm going to zoom right back up the ladder."

"Get cramps if sit down too soon after running."

"Suit yourself." He gazed out at the hazy blue Pacific, laughing. "Emily knew I'd make it back, even after seventeen long months without a writing assignment. She's been a constant source of inspiration to me, through thick and thin." He turned and gestured up at the hillside. "Even when it looked as though we might have

to give up our five-hundred-thousand house up there, she— Damn, did you see that?”

I was sucking in air. “See what?”

Frowning, Lee pointed up at his impressive red-tile and Moorish stone mansion and at the thick foliage that separated it from its neighbors. “I thought I spotted a flash of something, as though someone was watching me through binoculars.” He frowned and turned back toward the morning ocean again. “Might be my imagination. Might be some pinhead trying to spy on celebritites. They still remember Emily, you know, even though it’s been three seasons since she quit TV’s top-rated nighttime soap, *Heavy Breathing*, to devote herself full time to our marriage.”

“What’s the new job?”

“This isn’t the first time I’ve thought I was being—aw, you’ve got to watch out for Hollywood paranoia.” He rubbed his hands together. “I’m not just making a comeback, I’m bringing off a *triumphant* comeback. I’m going to do a miniseries.”

“Great. That’ll pay—”

“Top dollar. Enough to pay off our debts, or most of them, anyway. It was really rough going there for a while. We came damn close to losing both the Mercedes. Emily didn’t complain once, but sometimes I could see in her eyes that— Hi, Tag.”

Tag Marlo, with a silky golden spaniel on a leash, was approaching from behind. “How you doing, Lee?” He grinned, waved, as the dog tugged him forward.

“Was that grin at all sheepish?” Lee asked me after the incredibly handsome young actor had passed.

“Didn’t appear to be.”

“He’s heard. He knows I’m on the way back up,” said Lee, nodding. “When he was doing Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights Revisited*, we were great buddies. He and that dippy folk-rock singer he was living with dropped in on Emily and me all the time. The past year or so, though, it’s been averted gazes and sheepish smirks. And he only lives a half mile down the damn beach from us.”

“He’s heard, you’ve heard,” I said, checking my watch. “I’d like to hear before I hasten off to my ad agency.”

“Sure, Tag Marlo’d like the lead in *Alas, My Love*,” reflected Lee, watching the actor recede. “Who wouldn’t? And he’s aware that Bosco Cheever, hottest young producer in Hollywood, has hired me to do the damn script.”

“*Alas, My Love*,” I said. “That’s a book, isn’t it?”

"Is it a *book*?" He took a step back on the yellow sand, spreading his arms wide. "*Alas, My Love* is the blockbuster novel of the year, cuz. Been on every bestseller list from coast to coast for forty-seven weeks or more. Paperback rights sold for nine hundred thousand, which ain't bad in tight times like these. It's outselling books about cats, Jewish American Princesses, and how to reduce the size of your backside. It's a fantastic hit and I'm going to be turning it into a five-part miniseries."

"Have you read it yet?"

He shook his head. "I'm going to pick up a copy this afternoon. Two copies in fact, one to read and one to mark up. I imagine it's just one more fat romance, but I know I can turn it into a first-class miniseries. Tag might not be bad for one of the leads at that. I hear it's about a triangle situation."

My breathing was nearly normal. "Nobody seems to know much about the author."

"What a pen name he's got! Jason Renfrew, Junior." He laughed. "Probably a little-old-lady librarian living in Oxnard."

"Well, I'm glad to hear you're working again," I told him. "I got to be heading for work."

"Let's have lunch later in the week," he suggested. "My treat."

"I'm free Thursday."

"Thursday it is. I'll phone you about the place," he said. "That's another great thing about being in the chips again. They won't be disconnecting my phone for a while yet. I think I'll do another couple of miles before getting to the old typewriter." He went running with ease off along the bright morning beach.

Lee wasn't smiling when he came into Señor Legumbre's VegMex Restaurant that Thursday. He was wearing a new sport coat, new slacks, and new Italian shoes, but he looked pale under his tan. His walk reminded you of a kid coming in after school to write something a hundred times on the blackboard. Tucked under his arm was a fat hardcover copy of *Alas, My Love*.

"What's that godawful smell?" he inquired as he sat opposite me on the sunlit patio section of the place.

I obligingly sniffed the air. "Chili powder?"

"No, no—something vile."

"Guacamole?"

When he set the novel down on the glass tabletop, I noticed his hands were trembling slightly. The dozens of tiny yellow paper book-

marks fluttered like leaves in the wind. "Are you wearing a new aftershave?" he said.

"Matter of fact, yes. One of our advertising clients just intro—"

"Smells like a lumberjack's armpit."

"It's supposed to. What happened to your euphoria of the other day?"

He glanced around at the scatter of other lunch customers. "How many people have to buy a damn book to put it on the bestseller list?"

I shrugged. "I don't know. A hundred thousand?"

"More than that probably." Lee sighed. "And there are hordes of others taking it out of libraries. That's dreadful to contemplate."

"Isn't the novel any good?"

"In less than three weeks the paperback edition'll hit the stands. Paperback book critics no doubt have review copies already." He took another look around. "Some of the pinheads right in this room have read *Alas, My Love*."

"Possibly. But what does that—"

"It's about—" He leaned toward me, his voice dropping low. "You haven't read it?"

"Nope. I read mostly nonfict—"

"The godawful thing is about *me*!" he said in an anguished whisper. "About me and Emily!"

I scratched at my nose. "You mean about a couple sort of like you two. A television writer married to an actress who—"

"Don't I get paid handsome sums for expressing ideas clearly and concisely?" he asked. "No, I don't mean the damn thing is about a couple with a few similarities. I mean, cuz, the book is about me and Emily!"

"What they call a roman à clef?"

"What I call a knife in the back, a rug pulled out from under my life, a scaffold trap sprung beneath my hopes and—"

"That's right," I realized. "It's about adultery, isn't it?"

"*Alas, My Love*, old chum," he said, teeth on the verge of grinding, "is about how Emily has an affair behind my back. Emily, who I've always believed was one of the few supportive and trustworthy women in this entire godawful town. My other wife, you know, was a—"

"But this is fiction," I reminded him, reaching across to tap the book's bright dustjacket. "Even if you noticed a superficial resemblance to you and—"

"Superficial? Do you think I'd be on the verge of a total collapse if the halfwit resemblances were merely superficial?" Sighing again, he gazed at the high adobe wall around the restaurant patio. "Things had been going so well, too. The whole town knows Bosco Cheever gave me the nod for this miniseries. The trades are even hinting they'll get somebody like Richard Chamberlain for one of the leads. I'm hot again. MSG called me yesterday about working on a new series pilot for them. *Us, People, TV Life*, and *Mammon* have all called, begging for interviews. Even that pinhead Jess Rawlins wants to do a story for *The National Intruder*. Two years ago he was underfoot all the time, when I was writing *Passion* for CBS. Lately, though, it's sheepish grins and furtive nods from across the room." He folded his hands to keep them from quivering. "Then I had to go and read this damn book."

"You had to if you're going to adapt it."

"The horns of a dilemma," he said. "I don't have the heart to continue on this project, yet I need the damn dough and the credit."

"So do it," I advised.

"They'll all laugh at me," Lee said forlornly. "The poor cuckold, scripting his own humiliation."

"Most of the people in your circle probably don't know what cuckold means, so—"

"They sure as hell know the principle involved."

"Tell you what, I'll read the book. Maybe you're imagining these parallels between you—"

"This isn't the result of a deranged mind at the end of its tether," he assured me, his voice rising as he snatched *Alas, My Love* up off the table. "Bosco Cheever doesn't offer nearly twice scale to a scriptwriter who's on the verge of going bonkers—" He paused, grew thoughtful. "I wonder if Bosco *knows*. He did give me a rather sheepish look once when my agent and I were in negot—"

"Say, you airheads, this ain't a literary tearoom." The stocky moustached proprietor had come stalking over to our table. "You want to read books, hire a—Oops! Sorry, Mr. Branner."

"That's okay, Lyle."

"I know you're on the rise again," apologized the owner. "I just didn't recognize you from the back. It's my steadfast policy never to insult people unless they're on the way down." He glanced over at me appraisingly.

"My chum's neither on the rise or the decline," explained Lee.

"He's an advertising account exec and has remained on a successful dead level for untold eons."

"I got some great ideas for ads," confided Lyle to me.

"We'll order shortly," Lee said.

"Sure, take your time." He strode off, pausing to snarl at the patrons of another table.

"See? My status has improved," said Lee. "When I was in here last month, Lyle kicked me in the slats." He opened the novel to the place marked by the first of the dozens of slips of yellow paper.

I noticed that nearly half the left-hand page had been marked with a pale-yellow highlighting pen. "Maybe we ought to order pretty soon. I've got a client meeting at—"

"Listen to this." Lee cleared his throat. "'She stood poised upon the precipitous diving board above the liquid turquoise of the sun-drenched opulent swimming pool. Her petite figure was exquisite, a nubile statue of frozen poetry capped by her desirable auburn hair, which was the color of burnished brass forged in the smithy of idolatry. Jacques Rambeau's manhood was aroused as he drank in the ravishing radiance of her lithe—' Well?"

"Vivid writer."

"The prose is godawful. But don't you recognize my wife when you hear her described?"

I shook my head. "Lots of women are small and have red hair."

"So thought I." He ran his finger along the underscored paragraph.

"On the lush inner portion of her maddening left thigh was a delicate scar in the shape of a crescent moon.' See?"

"Does Emily have a scar the shape of a crescent moon on her thigh?"

"Surely you've noticed it, all the times you've been poolside at our place."

"We were only there once, Lee, four years ago. Tell you the truth, when I swim I take off my glasses and I can't see a—"

"Well, she does and this Renfrew bastard describes it exactly. Along with many other intimate details of her structure." He slammed the book shut. "He also recounts, as best he can in his halting prose, her speech patterns, attitudes, likes and dislikes. He even knows that her favorite after-sex snack is popcorn with garlic salt smeared on it."

"Emily's a well known actress. Lots of magazine articles might have—"

"No, this guy knows her, cuz." He flipped *Alas, My Love* open

again. "How about this passage? 'He was tall and reed-slim, a Lincoln-esque sapling of a man with a foursquare face and hands like slabs of raw lumber.' That's me—called Lance Bengal in this book."

"That could be a young Gregory Peck or dozens of other guys."

"Okay, I grant you some of this could be coincidence," Lee admitted, commencing to leaf through the pages. "But as Renfrew goes on and describes this disgusting and steamy affair between Emilia Bengal and Jacques Rambeau behind the noble and unsuspecting back of Lance Bengal, he—"

"Is Bengal a writer like you?"

"No, that's switched around. Emilia's the writer, her husband's a fading movie actor, and Rambeau is a hotshot TV director."

"Which isn't very close to your—"

"Allow me to continue," he requested while turning to another marked passage. "Every time Emily and—every time Emilia and Jacques meet to perpetuate their filthy relationship, all the dates match."

"What dates?"

"If Lance Bengal is out of town or stuck late at the studio the dates given in the damn book match exactly with the dates that I myself, in real life, was out of town or delayed at the studios over the past four, five years. Every damn one!"

"How can you be certain of that?"

"Because I keep a journal. I went back, once I realized what I was reading here, and double-checked," he said. "I'm going to leave all my notes and journals to the University of—"

"You're really convinced this novel is a fictionalized account of an affair between Renfrew and your wife?"

"Yes; there's no other answer." He closed the book once more. "It's tearing me apart."

"But if Emily'd been having an affair for years, you'd have suspected some—"

"Has your wife ever fooled around?"

"No, she doesn't go in for—"

"How can you be sure?"

"I just am."

"You go out of town on godawful assignments for your nitwit agency all the time. There's no way you can be absolutely certain she—"

"I trust her."

"Ah, I trusted Emily, too." He held up the thick novel. "And look."

I said, "What does Emily say?"

"I haven't mentioned it to her."

"Why not? If you're brooding about whether or not it's true, you—"

"I'm not brooding about that. I know this godawful book is true, a thinly veiled account of my trusted wife's infidelity."

"Maybe, though, she could suggest another explanation for how—"

"I don't intend to bring the subject up with her," he said firmly.

"I have a certain pride and I'll be damned if I'll go sniveling to her over this."

After a few seconds I suggested, "Maybe this Jason Renfrew, Junior, could offer some explan—"

"Oh, I'll find *him*," he said, turning the back of the book toward me. "He's a mystery man right now, but I'll track him to his lair."

The author's photo on the dustjacket was a shadowy thing, showing only the back of a man wearing a trenchcoat with the collar turned up and a sport-car cap. You couldn't get any real idea what he looked like.

"It might be better to forget all about it," I said. "Just do the script, collect your money, and—"

"*Forget?* Forget about the one man in the world who's made a mockery of my life. Emily has been my main source of inspiration all these happy years and— No, I'll find Renfrew, whoever he may be, and wherever he is on the face of this earth."

"If he's really writing about you and Emily, he's got to be in Greater Los Angeles somewhere."

"I'll find him and teach him a lesson."

"Hey, what do you mean? Doing any violence to him'll only cause you more—"

"Once I confront the man, I'll decide exactly how to handle him," he said. "There are certain unwritten laws that apply to situations such as this."

"My advice," I said, "is to—"

"This has gone beyond advice."

Two days later, I had to fly to Iola, Wisconsin, and so I wasn't around while Lee Branner carried out most of his investigation to find out who the mysterious Jason Renfrew, Junior, really was. We did talk by phone once or twice, so I know what he was up to. One of our clients, Mother Zooker's Cookies, has its main offices back in Iola. You've no doubt seen pictures of the famous two-story-high giant cookie jar that houses the company's offices there. We've used,

at the insistence of the company, the cookie-jar offices in quite a few of our print ads. Millions of people associate that quaint jug-shaped building with Mother Zooker's Cookies and the slogan "Nearly As Good As Homemade!"

The problem we had in Iola was that three members of a radical terrorist group called the Skid Row Commandos had waylaid and robbed a Kropfhauser Armored Car, stolen \$420,000, and were, due to a complex and highly unlikely string of circumstances, holed up in the cookie jar. They'd been there for twenty hours when I was sent to Wisconsin, and by that time television-news viewers all across the country had seen the famous cookie-jar offices surrounded by armed police.

It was publicity certainly, yet we were afraid a certain percentage of people would start associating our cookies, all 26 Goodness-to-Gracious Varieties, with crime and violence. My job was to come up with a quick radio campaign that would cash in on the media attention while at the same time disassociating us from these wild-eyed, bearded terrorists.

The assignment kept me in Iola for close to two weeks. The armored-car robbers held out in there for seven and a half days and by the time they surrendered and came out, the cookie jar was riddled with bullet holes. I had to work out some print ads to minimize that, too, and also convince the client to patch the thing up as soon as possible. Certain members of the Mother Zooker board wanted to flaunt the holes and launch a campaign about their cookies being made while the bakeries were under siege and so on. I talked them out of that, pointing out that gunshots and cookies make for poor fusion. But it took a full three days of meetings and conferences.

All the while, Lee was on the trail of Jason Renfrew, Jr. It is possible that originally he intended only to confront the guy. As the pursuit dragged on, however, his anger and outrage increased. Having written several police shows over the years, he knew how to go about his search in a methodical way. Even though he was dead sure Renfrew was a pen name, he patiently searched through all the local phonebooks and city directories. He even used his contacts with the motor-vehicle people and the phone company. There was no listing anywhere. Not even an unlisted phone for anyone named Jason Renfrew, Jr.

Next, feigning casualness, he called the producer of the miniseries.

Bosco Cheever had a thin nasal voice and a terse style of speech. "So?" was his greeting when Lee phoned him at his Burbank offices.

"I've been reading *Alas, My Love*," began Lee. "It's a—a great book, Bosco. I really appreciate the opportunity to turn it into television, it's going to be—"

"Okay, okay."

"The thing is, Bosco, I—what's that gurgling sound?"

"Toilet flushing."

"You're in the john? You're taking this call on that phone of yours in there?"

"Yep."

"Far be it from me to criticize—you're a man of culture and sensibility, Bosco—but flushing the toilet while talking business lacks dignity."

"I don't do it with everybody. What's up?"

"I think it'd be a good idea for Renfrew and I to talk over a few things. Minor character problems and—"

"Who's Renfrew?"

"The fellow who wrote the book."

"Oh, him. Impossible."

"Why?"

"Who can figure writers? It's in his contract. No direct contact with us."

"Wouldn't he make an exception if—"

"Nope. That all?"

"Who's his agent?"

"Ugh. That Lena Kapp bimbo."

"Thanks. I'll have the treatment in to you by no later than—"

"So long."

Lee heard water running as the phone was being hung up.

He tried to charm fat Lena Kapp. "You're looking well, Lena. Trim and fit."

She sat, immense in a flowered caftan, behind her small blond desk. "Horse crap," she replied. "I look like a sack of lard. Who's your agent these days?"

"Lowell Swinefort."

"Lowell Swinefort." She chuckled. "I thought he'd died."

"He's alive and doing very—"

"Sure, like I'm trim and fit."

He looked beyond her. Out the windows of her tower office he saw a private plane go drifting by through the haze. "The reason I—" "I'm not taking on any new clients."

"No, no, I'm happy with Lowell. The reason—"

"How can you be happy with a pinhead who's coked out of his nut ninety-nine percent of the time and hasn't gotten you work in two years?"

"I was only out of work seventeen months. And I've just signed to do the *Alas, My Love* miniseries."

"I know. That was Renfrew's idea. Sounded suicidal to me, getting a washed-out hack to take a—"

"Wait now." He stiffened in the low chair. "Renfrew suggested me for this-scripting job?"

"It sure as heck wasn't my idea. Renfrew had enough clout with Cheever to convince him you were the one."

"Then Renfrew and Bosco have met?"

She shrugged, her massive body jiggling. "Who knows? Renfrew is too damned independent for me, but the book's already earned almost two million five so I don't kvetch too much."

"Lena, I'd like to meet Renfrew. Talk the book over with him, explain how I want to approach it for television."

"No." She stood and the floor shook. "Jason Renfrew, Junior, is a very private man. He grants no interviews, won't see anyone. It's fouled up the chance to get him extra publicity, but—"

"Since he knows my work, Lena, he'd make an exception in—"

"Listen, schmuck, he won't even see *Life* magazine. You think he's going to talk to you?" She rumbled toward the door. "See you around campus."

Lee stood, remaining next to his chair. "A letter? Can you forward him a letter in which I'll outline my questions and feelings and—"

"He doesn't want to hear anything from anybody." She jerked her office door open wide. "I don't send him anything but money."

"You've seen him, haven't you?"

Her tiny eyes avoided meeting his. "Haven't so far, no," she answered. "He's a recluse."

"Don't you even talk to him on the phone?"

"He doesn't have a phone."

"Renfrew is a pen name, isn't it?"

"Is it?" She nodded at the open doorway. "Scram now, Branner."

Lee didn't do any writing on the television treatment of *Alas, My*

Love over the next few days. He'd sit in his studio, gazing out at the calm Pacific far below, with the novel resting in his lap.

Every time he started to try to work on adapting it, he'd become distracted by one of the passages he'd marked earlier.

"You know what my mother used to fix me when I came trudging home from school?" inquired Emilia as she reposed in silken but sparsely clad luxury upon the languid bed in their Beverly Glen hideaway. "Ketchup sandwiches. Yes, just ketchup spread on cheap white bread. We were disgustingly poor in my youth, dearest Jacques..."

"Ketchup sandwiches," he muttered. "That's what Emily's halfwit mother fixed her. She's always telling me that sad story. Even on our honeymoon, she— Hey!"

He leaped up, book thumping to the floor, and ran to the side window of his studio. Scowling, he scanned the distant trees and scrub on the nearest hillside. He'd sensed the brief flash of sunlight hitting the lenses of binoculars.

Even though he remained at the window for several minutes, he couldn't make out anything.

Finally, book tucked under his arm, he left. He drove his Mercedes over into the Beverly Glen canyon, searching for the lovers' hideaway cottage as described in the book. He had no luck, and one suspicious old lady who was out pruning her flowers wrote down his license number.

Four more uneasy days went by. He hadn't found Renfrew and he hadn't written a word. When Bosco called, Lee lied, told him he was turning out pages of the treatment each and every day and would have it finished by the following week.

That evening, as dusk settled over the beach, he decided to talk to his wife about the whole business.

"Must you bring that thing to the dinner table?" she asked when he plumped *Alas, My Love* down next to his plate.

She was a slim auburn-haired woman, and as attractive and bright as Renfrew had described her.

"It's my work," he said.

"You know how much I dote on you and what you write, Lee," Emily said, passing him the salad bowl. "Still, you've been a real grump ever since you got this damn assignment."

"Can you," he inquired, watching her intently, "guess why?"

"I suppose it's because you haven't done a day's work in two and a half years and you feel rusty. That's understandable. But—"

"Seventeen months. I was only without an assignment for seventeen months. Emily, I've read this damn book from cover to cover. Twice."

"I hear it isn't very well written."

"Oh, so? You haven't read it?"

"You know I read mostly anthropology and—"

"It's about us!" He'd lost control, was shouting. "About you and me and—this Renfrew bastard!" He slapped the cryptic photo of the author. "Its six hundred and forty-two godawful pages deal in minute detail with the affair this lout had with you over the past five years or so. And about how I, fool that I am, never suspected a blinking thing. Never even guessed I was being cuckolded."

"Being what?"

"Ah, that's perfect. I knew you'd pull that, avoid the major issue and pick at my language."

"Have you stopped taking those pills Dr. Hedley gave you?"

"What the hell has that got to do—"

"You're getting all purplish in the face and froth is forming on your pale lips," she pointed out. "I think you ought to take something to calm you down."

"You deny it?" he was on his feet now, waving the novel in the air.

"That I had an affair with—Renfrew, is it?"

"Here I looked up to you as the ideal wife, a constant source of inspiration for me. Now—" His shoulders slumped, the book dropped to his side.

She rose gracefully to her feet. "Our relationship is better than this, Lee," she said quietly. "I won't have you accusing me of—"

"Did you or didn't you?"

"I'll be sleeping in the guest room tonight." She left him there at the dinner table with the cooling food.

The next morning at dawn, while running along the grey beach alone, Lee suddenly halted. "Lena sends him royalty checks," he said, snapping his fingers.

That afternoon he went into the building on Wilshire where Lena Kapp had her offices. By hiding in a deserted conference room that had once been used by a now defunct cable-television service, he was able to linger in the building until it was locked up for the

night. Then he went sneaking up two flights to Lena's suite and, after determining the agent and her staff were long gone, let himself in.

On the address wheel on her desk he found Jason Renfrew, Jr.'s address given as 232 Otramar Road, San Amaro Beach, California.

Lee slipped free of the building by way of a service door, hurried to his Mercedes, and went driving down the night coast to the nearby beach town.

There was a prickly fog that night. Lee spent twenty minutes finding Otramar Road and nearly ten more spotting 232, which for some reason was situated between 242 and 248. Renfrew lived in a cottage that sat on the downside of the twisting road, its back hanging out over the dark beach and propped up on stilts.

He parked his car up the road from the place, sat in it for a few minutes. He discovered he was breathing openmouthed, nearly panting. Pressing his lips together, he opened the glove compartment and yanked out the .32 revolver he kept there.

He tucked that into the waistband of his trousers and climbed free of the car. Striding, he hurried down to the front door of the cottage.

Lights were on and he heard an electric typewriter going, along with a hi-fi playing Beethoven.

Lee didn't knock. He just turned the knob of the door, found it wasn't locked, and shoved his way into the cottage.

Seated at a woebegone old desk, facing the doorway, was a small sandy-haired man of thirty one. He lifted his glasses up, resting them atop his head, and stared at Lee.

"You, huh?" Lee crossed the threadbare matt rug. "Jess Rawlins, a hack reporter for that godawful *National Intruder*."

"What brings you to my—"

"This is terrible. It's bad enough she makes a cuckold of me, but to do it with a schlub like—"

"Makes you a what?"

"It's disenchanting," muttered Lee, edging nearer to the staring Rawlins. "She, the woman who, up until now, inspired me to my greatest creative heights has a shabby affair with you. Then, you slime, you turn it all into a sleazy novel and to top it off tell them to hire me to do the TV adaptation."

"Lee; listen." Rawlins rose carefully out of his chair. "I admit I wrote the book."

"Of course you did." He tugged out the revolver and pointed it at

him. "You defile my wife, brag about it in print, make me the butt of Lord knows how many cruel jokes. Now I'll get even with you for that!"

"Lee, you know I'm just a hack—a writer for hire."

Lee fired twice.

"Just the front." Both slugs caught Rawlins in the chest. He cried out and went stumbling back until he smacked into the window behind him. "I only ghosted the book for your wife. She wanted to make some extra money so—" He slumped, fell dead.

Lee lowered the gun. Then he realized what Rawlins had been trying to tell him.

DETECTIVERSE

CRASH DIET

by K. E. STEVENS

"You'll have to excuse me," she said,
As her dying fiancé bled.

"There's no use to plead,
I've fulfilled my need,
To deflate your very fat head."

© 1984 by K. E. Stevens.

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME BEAT

by **R. E. PORTER**

MURDER ON CAMPUS: The earliest mystery novel to be set on a college campus ("Marle College" in New Hampshire) was George Parsons Lathrop's *In the Distance*, published in 1882. Both book and author are forgotten today, but it was the pioneer effort of some 632 mystery novels and short-story collections with academic settings and/or sleuths. The most famous is probably *Gaudy Night* by Dorothy L. Sayers, and the best is probably *The Horizontal Man* by Helen Eustis. Writers as diverse as Anthony Boucher (*The Case of the Seven of Calvary*), Amanda Cross (*Death in a Tenured Position*), and Hillary Waugh (*Last Seen Wearing*) have used the academic setting to good avail.

These books and the rest of the 632 are listed and, in many cases, discussed at length in *College Mystery Novels*, an annotated bibliography by John E. Kramer, Jr. and John E. Kramer III (Garland Publishing, \$35.00). The arrangement is chronological, with author and title index and a separate discussion of all series characters. Thus

we learn that the first professorial series sleuth was Augustus S. F. X. Van Dusen, "The Thinking Machine," and the most recent is Neil Kelly in the novels of the pseudonymous S. F. X. Dean published by Walker and Company. (We doubt if the similarity in those initials is mere coincidence.)

The book is a fascinating study of what has become a sub-genre of the detective story. My only regret is that the listing of novels and collections leaves no room for good individual short stories like Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Three Students" and Ellery Queen's "The African Traveler."

SAINTLY SLEUTHS: As recently as the late 1930s, mystery readers would have been hard-pressed to uncover a religious detective other than G. K. Chesterton's popular Father Brown. Even Anthony Boucher's Sister Ursula did not appear until 1940. The two Sister Ursula novels, *Nine Times Nine* and *Rocket to the Morgue*, have just been reprinted in a British omnibus by Zomba Books, along with two other Boucher novels.)

The years since have brought us an occasional rabbi (Harry Kemelman's David Small) or minister (Charles Merrill Smith's Reverend Randolph) acting as detective, but it's only recently that priests and nuns have staged a big comeback in the novel length. Within a few months last winter and spring, we had the latest cases of William X. Kienzle's Father Koesler (*Kill and Tell*) and Ralph McInerny's Father Dowling (*The Grass Widow*). McInerny was doubly active, also producing the latest book about Sister Mary Teresa Dempsey (*And Then There Was Nun*) under the pseudonym of "Monica Quill." And an actual nun, Sister Carol Anne O'Marie, has joined the ranks of mystery writers with her first book about seventy-five-year-old Sister Mary Helen (*A Novena for Murder*).

COMIC-STRIP DETECTIVES:

Don McGregor's 1930s private eye Nathaniel Dusk, introduced last year in a four-issue comic-book mini-series, returns this September in another four-issue mini-series, *Apple Peddlers Die at Noon*. It's set in July 1934 and promises another evocative look at the life and crimes of Depression-era New York City. The series, with art work by Gene Colan, is published by DC Comics and sold mainly through comic-book specialty shops.

Another series sleuth, Modesty Blaise, began life as a comic-strip heroine—a sort of female James Bond—and went on to star in a se-

ries of successful novels and short stories by Peter O'Donnell. Several of the recent books remain unpublished in America and this fall The Mysterious Press will begin publishing the recent ones in hardcover, while reprinting the earlier adventures in paperback.

COUNTRYMAN PRESS: Another small publisher is expanding its mystery list. The Countryman Press (PO Box 175, Woodstock, VT 05091), which also publishes as Foul Play Press, has two notable collections due this fall. Dorothy Salisbury Davis's *Tales for a Stormy Night* contains her collected short stories and Joseph Hansen's *Brandstetter & Others* comprises five novelets, two about homosexual insurance investigator Dave Brandstetter. Also due this fall is the first U.S. edition of Reginald Hill's *A Clubbable Woman*, his initial Dalziel and Pascoe novel, as well as paperback reprints of two more Nameless Detective novels by Bill Pronzini, *Undercurrent* and *Blowback*.

COMING ATTRACTIONS:

David Geherin, author of *Sons of Sam Spade*, takes another look at private detectives in *The American Private Eye: The Image in Fiction*, a study of twenty-seven series characters. It'll be published early this fall by Frederick Ungar.

Jon L. Breen's annotated bibliography of courtroom fiction, tentatively titled *Novel Verdicts*, is due from Scarecrow Press early in 1985.

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BLOODY VISIONS

by **CHRIS STEINBRUNNER**

The good ghost stories aren't seasonal; we fall under their spell at any twilight, shuddering at the voices of the wind and the kiss of all-embracing darkness. PBS's laudatory *Mystery!* series, now surely an established favorite among devotees of the thriller, has abandoned Rumpole and Cribbs and their friends to swerve into a new mysterious direction: dramatizations of classic tales of the supernatural woven from the works of distinguished authors and given excellent production gloss. If gloss is at all the proper word for the uneasy glows encountered in the stories themselves.

Producer June Wyndham-Davies, an old *Mystery!* hand, disavows any of the traditional glows of ghostly apparitions, however, and even the very description "ghost story." Audiences in search of graveyard shockers will find no drip-and-gore here. Instead, her hauntings concern "everyday families and the inexplicable things that happen to them, which can happen to any of us. Everyone has had some sort of supernatural experience, such as a moment when a room becomes suddenly cold . . ."

Happily, the authors whose works comprise the series are all experts at cold rooms and their variants. Edith Wharton, who appears currently to be coming out of a period of neglect, is represented with sev-

eral stories, and is joined by Walter de la Mare, L. P. Hartley, and others. Wharton debuts the series with "Bewitched," in which a farmer's wife begins to believe a country rumor that her husband is being enraptured anew by the spirit of a dead former lover, now possessing the body of the deceased girl's sister. Is a betrayal actually happening, and is it actually happening with a ghost? Wharton's questioning ambiguity continues in the series' adaptation of "The Lady's Maid's Bell," in which a terrified domestic finally confronts the woman who, in upstairs service in the back corridors of a gloomy huge house, has died under mysterious circumstances. As well, PBS presents Wharton's "Afterward," the most lingering and fragile tale of the lot—about a couple who learn that encountering a spirit sometimes may not make its impact until long, long after the fact.

Other classic authors are served equally as well. A bachelor writer renting rooms is disturbed by a child's wail in the night—from somewhere within a building where there are no children—in May Sinclair's "The Intercessor." A young man is obsessed with the idea his aunt is in league with the devil—"The old hag is listening to every thought you think," he warns a doubting friend—in a de la Mare yarn. A worried mother follows her

small daughter into a forbidding, treacherous hedge-maze one week, and the boisterous guests at a housewarming make sport of an alleged resident ghost—to their peril—the next. Summertime is equally as good a part of the year for a good supernatural tale as is the autumnal season, if the chill is right. The *Shades of Darkness* series on PBS's *Mystery!* is worth a shiver.

Of all the actors to play Mickey Spillane's raw, tough private eye Mike Hammer on the screen or television since *I, the Jury* was first filmed in 1953—the list includes Biff Elliot, Ralph Meeker, and among others Spillane himself—no one brings more class to the act (and has done as much classical acting) than Stacy Keach. And, indeed, no one else in theatrical or TV movies has played the Hammer role more than once. Now he stars in a television series based on the well known private eye (a previous teleshow with Darren McGavin ran in the Fifties) and it is a vigorous and handsome job. The tele-feature which preceded it, called

Murder Me, Murder You, as reported last issue, won an Edgar, and a second feature, *More Than Murder*—in which Hammer's best friend, police captain Pat Chambers, is framed with cocaine—had just as much punch, with a heart-stopping Staten Island Ferry chase finale.

Part of the series' electric look is its well used New York City exteriors. (Spillane, however, never specified his city.) Hammer now operates out of a present-day, gritty East Side office but we follow him constantly onto busy, pulsing, real streets. Much of the look is due to Keach, who brings to this role as much as he did to playing Hamlet. "I've loved the guy for years," he says of Hammer, "and I read most of the Spillane books when they were published." Much, too, is due to the good writing, as in Joe Gores' "Seven Dead Eyes," in which a group of private investigators are killed off.

Catch Hammer now. And catch, as well, also on CBS, *Cagney & Lacey*, two policewomen making a welcome return to a television season rife with top crime.

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THE JURY BOX

by ALLEN J. HUBIN

Just a few months ago I complained about failure of certain desirable English works to achieve U.S. publication. I mentioned the last Dr. Davie novel by V. C. Clin-

ton-Baddeley as an example. Now, though I can claim no credit for our good fortune, the Davie tale is before me, along with a pair of earlier novels by another author which are

also rescued from bibliovion by the same enterprising publisher.

The Clinton-Baddeley is *To Study a Long Silence* (Harper Perennial, \$2.95), left nearly complete by the author at his death in 1970 and published in 1972 in England after a final fleshing out by the author's nephew. This is a nicely rewarding tale, primarily for great richness of observation and for fluid prose. Davie, retired Oxford don, attends an amateur play—a comedy with masked players. Murder attends, too, and the detection thereof is a Davie weakness. He is drawn into the matter; he inquires into personality and behavior; he notes the changes attendant upon the hurried pace of the decades; and in due course—but, ah! too late—he finds the killer.

Only two of the novels by C. H. B. Kitchin (1895–1967) about stockbroker-sleuth Malcolm Warren reached these shores. The first, *Death of My Aunt*, did so in 1929, and now reappears (Perennial, \$3.50). Here is not fair-play detection but rather a revealing study of the variegated Warren clan, which provides both corpse and suspects. Malcolm's aunt unexpectedly invites him for a weekend. Promptly on the Saturday she dies of poison, and her husband—devoutly despised by most of the clan but not by Warren—is well cast as prime suspect. Malcolm pokes around, and the killer pops out of a hat.

"A historian of the future will probably turn, not to blue books or statistics, but to detective stories if he wishes to study the manners

of our age." Thus opines Malcolm Warren in his third case, from 1939: *Death of His Uncle* (Perennial, \$3.50), in its first U.S. edition. Here the author does play fair with the reader and provides the stronger tale of the two. Hamilton Findlay, uncle to an acquaintance of Malcolm's and a man of settled habits, abruptly announces a trip to the country. He fails to return on schedule, and Malcolm—now a man of some criminous experience—is asked to help backtrack on the trail. Worthy product of the Golden Age, this, for readers and perhaps also for historians.

A prediction—a bit rash, given how early in 1984 I write this: that *Death at Charity's Point* by William G. Tapply (Scribners, \$12.95), will at the least be among the finalists when the best first mystery of the year is selected by the Mystery Writers of America. This impressive debut, winner of the Scribner Crime Novel Award, swept me into its plot, made me care about the people, and left me high and satisfied at the end. Brady Coyne, Boston attorney, is asked by one of his wealthy clients to determine if her son really suicided into the Atlantic. The son taught at a prep school, where nothing seems amiss. But in due course one or two anomalies appear, drawing Coyne down a trail dark and dangerous.

The masterful Dick Francis's annual spellbinder is *The Danger* (Putnam, \$15.95). Andrew Douglas is a private anti-kidnaping specialist. In Italy a woman jockey is taken, and her wealthy father driv-

en to the wall by demands and threats. Douglas, calm, insightful, advises negotiation, then payment. Chance offers him a glimpse of the organizer of the snatch, a specialist in his own right and a wily and worthy opponent for Douglas in Italy, then England and the U.S. This is high-tempo suspense, with effortless narration and the handling of delicate relationships with a sure and sensitive hand.

A long, driving, convincing tale of police suspense—that's *One Police Plaza* by William J. Caunitz (Crown, \$14.95), marred only by the author's over-preoccupation with matters sexual. Sara Eisinger is brutally murdered—a common-enough sort of event in New York, but Lieutenant Dan Malone wants the case solved, especially when it appears someone badly wants it shelved. He marshals his troops, follows leads involving Israelis, the owners of a travel agency, high city offices, and some forty policemen

who aren't serving where their records say they are.

The bloody ending is played on a large and fanciful stage, but the author's preparation is so effective that this, too, can be swallowed. Caunitz can write; I expect we'll see more of him.

Aside from unappetizing glimpses of Spenser the killer, *Valediction* (Delacorte, \$12.95) is an absorbing, intense continuation of Robert B. Parker's series about his Boston private eye. Spenser's love, Susan, has earned her Ph.D. and gone off to San Francisco to practice clinical psychology, declaring her undying love and not giving him her new address. Abandoned, mood black, energies low, his interest in survival seems inadequate as he consents to look for a missing dancer, reportedly kidnaped by a religious cult. This leads to the local heroin industry, and Spenser is a survivor, though five others are left dead by his hand.

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DETECTIVER SE

UP AGAINST THE WALL

by MILLEA KENIN

Though only the painter
Deserves to be blamed,
They've hung this poor picture—
Unfair! It was framed!

© 1984 by Millea Kenin.

DETECTIVERSE

MEDIUM, NOT TOO RARE

by G. STERLING LEIBY

The seance led by Miss MacPherson
Most definitely proves her
To be an ordinary person
Until the spirit moves her.

© 1984 by G. Sterling Leiby.

OCCUPATIONAL HAZARDS

by MARY A. BROOKS

There once was a bartender, Nate,
Who stole from the till one night, late.
He should feel right at home,
For although he can't roam,
Spending time behind bars is his fate.

A baker who gambled, named Joe,
Had a difficult time with cash flow—
Couldn't pay for his losses,
Was killed by crime bosses—
His problem was raising the dough.

The cutlass brought death to freebooters.
Out West, thieves succumbed to six-shooters.
But it takes a smart sleuth
To discover the truth
About looters who program computers.

© 1984 by Mary A. Brooks.

a **NEW** short story by

ERNEST SAVAGE

*Five brand new hundred-dollar bills. Sharp enough to shave with
and smelling oddly like coffee . . .*

THE BIG WINNERS

by **ERNEST SAVAGE**

His wife Becky and her twin sister Rona had gone to Reno a week ago today, Monday, he said. Late Thursday night Becky had phoned him with the news that she had won \$25,000 at keno. She was drunk, he said, and he hadn't believed her: "Becky's full of garbage, even more than Rona. I thought it was one of her lousy jokes and forgot about it until yesterday." He scratched an armpit under the white T-shirt he was wearing. He was a big sloppy-fleshed man. He was a warehouseman, he'd told me earlier, and he had a warehouseman's build.

"What happened yesterday, Mr. Randall?"

"Well, they were supposed to be home yesterday afternoon, but they didn't show. They go over to Reno a couple of times a year, the two of 'em. They always do everything together, the two of 'em."

"Does Rona live nearby?" I said.

"No, her and Harry live over in the Sunset district. Harry Cruickshank. But they're together almost all the time, can't pry 'em apart."

"So yesterday—?"

"So last night when they hadn't showed up by dark I called Reno information and got the numbers of a bunch of casinos. The fourth one I called, The Golden Arm, said sure enough a broad named Rebecca Randall had won \$25,000 Thursday night and congratulations, Mr. Randall."

© 1984 by Ernest Savage.

His puffy face hadn't changed expression until then. Then it smiled, as well it might.

He wasn't a man you could like right off. For one thing, his old frame house had the reek of permanent unkemptness about it, of dirty corners and dust mice under the sagging chairs, of old cooking. But that told me as much about his wife as it did about him.

"She took it in cash?"

"That's what they told me."

"Did you call the Reno police, Mr. Randall?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Well—" He scratched that troublesome armpit again. "Harry and me talked about that last night and decided not. You see, those two gals ain't the dainty little virgins we married fifteen years ago and we didn't want no cops to find 'em in the sack with—well, you know what I mean."

"In what we call a compromising situation."

"Yeah. Harry and me decided we'd rather send a private man."

"To do what, Mr. Randall?"

"Find 'em and bring 'em back."

I smiled. "Maybe I can find 'em, but I can't bring 'em back unless they want to come."

"I know that. But there's this other thing—"

"They might be in trouble."

"Right. With all that loot and boozin' and shootin' off their mouth the way they do, they might be in *bad* trouble."

"Which is why you should call the Reno cops."

"I told you why we don't want to do that." He squinted at me. "Do you want the job?"

I sighed, wishing Randall had picked another private investigator out of the yellow pages. God knows there are enough of us. I don't like Nevada. It's Mob Country, and no cop, or ex-cop, as I am, likes Mob Country. "Where are they staying?" I asked.

"Hell, I don't know. They never tell us. They never tell us a damn thing."

"Did you try to find out?"

"No. There must be three hundred motels over there. We figured that'd be a job for you. Will you take it?"

"I'll take it," I said, and then added firmly as I struggled out of the busted-spring couch he'd sat me in, "My fee is two hundred a day plus expenses, and I'll want five hundred before I leave town."

Surprisingly, he disappeared into the kitchen and then down into the basement and returned in a few minutes with five brand new hundred-dollar bills. Sharp enough to shave with and smelling oddly like coffee.

The night-shift manager of the Golden Arm Casino was delighted to confirm that a Mrs. Rebecca Randall had won \$25,000 last Thursday night. Big winners keep the little losers coming in hordes. It's good business to get the word out when somebody finds a pot of gold over here. It makes Reno look like end of the rainbow. He showed me pictures on a sandwich board in the lobby—the happy winner flanked by her equally happy sister, Rona. It was 1:00 A.M. Tuesday. I'd left Randall's four hours ago, stopped at my place for a toothbrush, and come straight over.

"They were something, those two." He shook his handsome, greying head in wonder. "They went straight to the crap tables and doubled it."

"You're kidding."

"I wish I was." The memory cooled his smiling face. "They were on a run like I've rarely seen before. Nine straight passes, if you can believe it."

"And then what?"

"They left. Went to the Money Machine across the street, where they won some more." Word gets around fast in this town.

"How much more?"

"Thirty-forty thousand, I heard."

"Cash?"

"What they took from there, I don't know. They took cash from here."

"You guys let them leave with all that cash?"

"They insisted. We'd have preferred to write them a check." It was clear he was no longer interested. His quick, night-man's eyes looked past me at the still heavy action in the room beyond.

"How many of your big winners get knocked on the head before they leave town, Mr. Zerbo?" I said.

His eyes were dead cold now. "That's cop business. Ask them."

I did, twenty minutes later, but got nowhere. They have their share of mayhem and murder in Reno, and maybe more, but there was nothing on the books about two middle-aged twin sisters who'd won a fortune and disappeared.

"It happens," the desk sergeant said.

I got a motel room on Virginia Street a few blocks from downtown and sat on the well pounded bed and looked in the yellow pages of the phonebook. As Randall had said, there are more places to sleep in Reno than fleas on a flophouse dog, and I gave up any thought of checking them out until morning.

How many warehousemen can slip into their basements and return a few minutes later with crisp hundred-dollar bills smelling like coffee? What if I'd asked for twice that many? Would he have produced them just as casually?

The next morning after breakfast I was back in my room by ten with a list of forty-five motels relatively close to downtown, one of which I hoped the girls had stayed in. By phone I checked twenty-one of them without luck and then went outside to stretch. On impulse, I walked across the parking lot to the office and a friendly woman behind the counter said, when I asked: "Of course they stayed here. They *always* stay here. You mean you've been calling all over town trying to find out where they stayed?" She laughed merrily, quite tickled by it.

I forced a smile. "What do you mean they *always* stay here?"

"Just that, Mr. Train. They've been coming here once or twice a year ever since I've owned the place. Ten years now. Isn't that right, Arlene?"

A black chambermaid was leaning in the open door to the owner's apartment behind the office. She came forward to the counter, nodding her head. "That's right," she said. "What's happened to them, mister?"

"Nothing that I know of," I said. "When did they check out?" I asked the woman behind the desk.

"Sunday morning."

"For home?"

"As far as I know."

"They never got there, did they?" Arlene said.

"Mrs. Randall's husband says they didn't. He hired me to find out where they did get to. Do you have any ideas?"

Arlene threw up her hands and walked away into the owner's apartment.

"Something happened to them, didn't it?" the woman behind the counter said.

"It's too soon to say that, but they had a lot of money when they left, didn't they?"

"Well, I guess they did. They were certainly very excited."

"About going home and telling their husbands maybe."

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Did they mention their husbands?"

"Not that I recall."

"Did they ever have any friends in their rooms here? Boy friends, maybe?"

It offended her. "I'm sure I wouldn't know about that, Mr. Train."

"Did you check them out Sunday morning?"

"Yes, I did."

"Could they have gone on someplace else, do you suppose? Like Vegas?"

"I doubt it."

I sighed. I'd lost her with the boy-friends question. I asked her for their registration card and she got it out and shoved it across the counter.

Rona had signed it for both of them. They were driving a Buick Skylark, license number NRY 642.

I had my toothbrush packed and was sitting by the window watching Arlene push her little service truck up to my door. She knocked once and came in quickly without being-asked. "You were waiting for me, weren't you?" she said.

"I figured you had something to tell me."

"I do. You know how much money those women left here with the other day?"

"Not exactly."

"*Eighty thousand dollars, plus some change.*"

"How do you know that?"

"Cause I was in their room when they counted it. Saturday afternoon. They had it laid out on the bed like play money. I never saw anything like it!"

"How come they let you see it?"

"They wanted *somebody* to see it! Just to help them believe it! It was too much for them."

"Did they tell anybody else about it?"

She shrugged. "Well, Becky said she called her husband about the keno win, but I'm not so sure about that. Neither of them liked their husbands worth a damn. They was talking about coming back here and getting divorced."

"They told you that?"

"They been telling me that for years. That's how *I* got here. Come to divorce a no-good husband and stayed."

"Did they make any friends?"

"Well, they were with a couple of guys when they won the keno, so they said."

"Did they bring them back here?"

"Not Friday or Saturday they didn't."

"How do you know that?"

"Cause I can tell how many people was in a room and who did what to who by just looking at it."

"How come you're telling me all this?"

"Cause I liked those two girls. They came here to have a good time and that's what they had. Sure, they'd get a little drunk and tumble the studs now and again, but they didn't pussyfoot around. And win, lose, or draw, they always tipped me."

"Did they tip you Sunday?"

"You bet they did."

"More than usual, I take it."

"You take it right, Mr. Train."

"A hundred, maybe?"

Her eyes narrowed a little. "What difference does it make?"

"Was it a brand new crisp hundred-dollar bill?"

She didn't answer.

"Do you still have it?"

She didn't answer.

"Look, Arlene, if it was a brand new crisp hundred-dollar bill and you still have it, will you go somewhere and write down the serial number on a piece of paper and give it to me?"

"Is that all you want?"

"That's all I want."

"Hang on a spell." She walked out and came back a few minutes later with a motel postcard on which she'd written three numbers, the last two digits of each being, in sequence, 17, 18, and 19.

"Three hundred," I said.

"Yes, sir." She was silent a while. "They're gone, aren't they?"

"Maybe not," I said without much conviction.

Arlene went back to her work and I took Randall's bills from my wallet and fanned them out. The last two digits in the highest numbered one, all of which were in sequence, was 73. All the other digits in the serial numbers of my five and Arlene's three were the same.

The twins had gotten home, all right, but that's as far as they had got.

I put in a call for Sergeant Bill Brady at the Folsom Street police station in San Francisco. When he came on, I asked him to check the record on Martin Randall and Harry Cruickshank. I gave him Randall's address and told him Cruickshank lived in the Sunset district and that I'd buy him dinner tonight for his trouble.

Then I put ten bucks under one of the pillows on my bed, feeling pretty cheap about it, and went outside and started home.

I got back to San Francisco at five o'clock that afternoon and picked up Brady just as he was through for the day. Brady's the best friend I've still got on the force—maybe the only one now, I don't know. I'd quit over the strike in '75 with only months to go for my twenty-year pension, an act of quixotic indignation I'd regretted many times since. I'd not only blown a little useful retirement pay but practically every friend I'd made in my adult life. But not Brady. Brady had wanted to quit, too, but he had a daughter in college and a sick wife and more common sense than I had. Now he had six months to go for his twenty, his wife had died, his kid had quit school and got married, and he could hardly wait to retire and join me in the private-eye business, which may or may not happen. He thinks there's big money in it.

We went to Nandino's, where we always go, and over drinks he told me that Martin Randall had no record, but his brother-in-law, Harry E. Cruickshank, had started out in life as a teenage car-thief and now held a Class II commercial pilot's license. Over steaks I told him the story of the missing twins and their eighty thousand dollars. "A small portion of which," I said, ending the recitation, "will pay our tab tonight."

Bill's eyes lit up. Large sums of money excite him.

"The way it looks," I said, "is this: the twins came home Sunday afternoon and stopped at Randall's first. They were out of their minds with all that money and probably told Randall he was about to get divorced—probably rubbed his nose in what a sad sack he was and he got mad and killed them. If I'm right, he has a couple of bodies on his hands and doesn't know what to do."

"Was there any sign of struggle around the house?"

"None that I saw, but I wasn't looking for that then. I didn't really get interested in him or the job until he handed me those crisp new bills."

"Why in hell would he call you in the first place?"

"He had a good reason to," I said. "Look, he knew—they *both* knew—they'd have to report their wives missing soon, like tomorrow at the latest, and they wanted to dry-run it with a private dick before they had to call you guys. Spot the weak points in their story and shore them up before it got official. They didn't figure I'd run into Arlene and her three-hundred-dollar tip. If I hadn't lucked out with her, it wouldn't have mattered what he paid me with, would it?"

"All right," Bill said agreeably, "so what does he do with the bodies?"

"He calls his brother-in-law and—"

"Why? That don't make sense, Sam."

"Yes it does, particularly since you tell me Cruickshank flies a plane. Look at it from Randall's point of view, Bill. He's got eighty thousand bucks and two bodies. He's scared. But he's also inventive, like any trapped animal. And since Cruickshank's in on the decision to hire me, he's almost got to be in on the body problem. Randall calls him and says, 'Harry, I just killed Becky and Rona,' and Harry says, 'Great! I've been wanting to kill Rona for years, I'll be a character witness at your trial,' and Randall says, 'Yeah, well, I got forty thousand bucks for lawyers' fees, unless you wanna help me get rid of the bodies and split it with me.'"

"Forty thousand?" Bill said.

"Why not? Maybe even thirty. Harry doesn't know how much the twins brought back, so Randall's problem is to decide what Harry's price is and keep the rest. And twenty will buy most guys who started out in life as hot-car jockeys."

"Twenty'll buy most guys who started out as cops, too."

I grinned, sort of tentatively. One of the reasons Bill wants to join me in the private-eye business is that he thinks a PI has opportunities to scoop up big wads of cash that a cop can't. Any cop of Bill's vintage has had to turn his back on fortunes time and time again—in car trunks, paper sacks, cocaine-dealers' apartments, blown safes, all kinds of leftover, untraceable cash he runs into in the course of his work. It's one of the reasons they travel in pairs—to keep each other honest.

"You're reading my mind, ain't you?" he said.

"It's going across your forehead like a computer printout. Randall gives Cruickshank twenty thousand, so he's got sixty left and you want it."

"Okay, why not?" His eyes flashed righteously. "Where'd it come

from? Reno, right? Where'd it come from before that? Probably from a bunch of suckers who live in San Francisco. And who's got it now? A filthy wife-killer! Has *he* got a moral right to it?"

"Have I? Have we? Keep your voice down, Bill."

He pressed forward across the table. "I've got this vision of Randall laid out dead somewhere and that sixty thou just sort of falling into your hands. Would you let it fall out again?"

"I'd have to let twenty fall out to match Cruickshank's, wouldn't I?"

"All right, so keep the forty! Why not?"

"Arlene knows the twins left Reno with eighty, Bill."

"All right, so slip her a buck or two."

"Then Randall stands up in court—since we're *not* going to kill him—and says there was sixty in his basement and where the hell is it?"

"Randall murders women and lies like a rug."

"And the IRS gets nosing around and finds out how much they won. If they don't already know—"

"Okay, so take ten, take five! That much could get lost in the shuffle! Take *something*, for Chrissakes!" He meant it. If nothing else, he was trying to establish a philosophy for future guidance. Brady & Train. Motto: *Make it or Take it*.

"Are you in some kind of trouble, Bill?"

"No, damn it—I'm paying my way. But I'm just plain sick and tired of everybody else in this town making ten times as much as I do. I'm sick and tired of rich pimps and mobsters, and dope merchants, and politicians and labor organizers and private dicks and some cops I know. I'm tired of watching it all pass around from one dirty hand to another and none of it coming my way. Oh, hell!" He bit the end off a cigar, jammed it in his mouth, and lit it.

He'd changed since his wife died. The best years they'd had of their twenty-five together were the two or three she'd spent dying. They were closer then than they'd ever been, and that sea-anchor in the stormy life all cops lead was gone for him now. He was watching me. "Forget it," he said. "I've had a tough day, possibly a tough life. What's next, shamus?"

"From here I got see Randall."

"Why? Theoretically you've done your job. Just call him up and tell him the two women are dead, as he damn well knows."

"But I can't prove it."

"Why should you? That's our job, Sam. Let us do it."

"You want the case, don't you, Bill?" I grinned at him again. "But you couldn't prove it, either, not without Arlene's money, or the bodies, or something we don't have yet. What's more, I owe Randall another day's work and I'm gonna give it to him whether he wants it or not."

"Okay, let me come with you."

"Tonight?"

"Yeah. I got tomorrow off, so why not? Besides, I'd like to measure the guy for a rope."

"Nuts. You want a look at his basement."

"What basement? Oh, that. I'd forgotten about that."

"In a pig's eye. Look, if you really want to help, go run a full make on Cruickshank. That commercial pilot's license interests me. Find out if he's got a plane and where he keeps it and who he flies for. If I had a body to dispose of, I wouldn't mind having an airplane to do it with. And check the car—a Buick Skylark, NRY 642."

"Hell, that's in Mexico by now, Sam. A guy like Cruickshank'd know how to arrange to have it stolen an hour after he got it. He probably got two thou for it Monday morning, plus an insurance payoff down the line. That's another racket that fires my boiler. My God, if—!" He stopped, shaking his head. He'd heard himself say it all before. "Hell, Sam, my problem is I can hardly wait to get out. Six months and fourteen days to go! Plan on me coming in with you, huh? Please. Huh? Look, I'll run Cruickshank tonight. I'll go down to the shop right now. Okay?"

"Okay," I said, figuring I could argue later that I meant okay only to the last part of what he'd said, not all of it.

Randall's shabby old house was on the NW corner of Rumsey and Marsh, one of the last private residences in the neighborhood, the rest having gone to apartments.

A light was on in his kitchen when I parked on Marsh and I could see him standing beyond the window, a phone pressed to his ear. I walked across his scrabbly back lawn to the porch and looked at him through the glass top of the back door, his left arm waving around as he talked. The counter behind his back was strewn with opened cans and dirty dishes, the linoleum floor beneath his feet unswept for weeks. A slob's house. Mr. and Mrs. Slob. I knocked hard on the glass of the door and watched him jump before he said something fast and hung up the phone.

"I got news for you," I said as he opened the door a crack and I pushed on in.

"Hey, Mr. Train," he said, a quick smile failing to reach his eyes. "Did you find 'em?" He glanced out the door before shutting it behind me.

"Did you expect me to, Mr. Randall?"

"Well—I hoped you would, naturally." The smile still hadn't reached his eyes and never would. "What's your news?"

"They won a bundle," I said, my voice thinned to a rasp by the cloying stink of ancient grease in the room. No available surface was without its unwashed clutter. The alcove leading to the basement door was opposite where I stood, the door ajar. "A whole bunch of brand new hundred-dollar bills they won."

"No kidding! How much?" He moved toward me but stopped a little out of reach. Standing straight; he was as tall as I but carried a lot more lard. His eyes told me that he knew that I knew now—cold as agates over the curved lift of his puffy cheeks, still arranged in a smile.

"Would you believe forty grand?"

It excited him beyond all expectation. His eyes actually lit up with a flash of glee. Forty must have been right on the nailhead, just what he'd told Cruickshank the twins had brought home.

"No kidding!" he said again; but it was weak, an afterthought. "Train, we've got to find 'em."

"Maybe we haven't been looking in the right place," I said. "Maybe they got all the way home, Mr. Randall, and something happened to them here." I let that work for a moment, before adding, "I mean here in San Francisco."

"But, my gosh," he said, "that was more than two days ago they came home—I mean were supposed to. Wouldn't the cops have found them by now—I mean their bodies, or something? Or car?"

"I checked with the cops tonight," I said. "No unidentified bodies, no missing Skylark—which would be worth maybe two grand, by the way, on the hot-car market. I mean, if somebody wanted to get rid of it."

Another little click in the calculating eyes. Cruickshank probably hadn't told him that. Cruickshank had probably said, "Look, I'll get rid of the car, Marty, don't worry about it." Honor among thieves.

"Maybe I ought to check with your brother-in-law," I said. "Maybe he knows something about this we don't. What do you say, Randall?"

"I just talked to him. He ain't heard nothing either. He's just as worried as I am."

"What kind of charter does he fly, Randall?"

"Who told you he flies charter?"

"You did."

"The hell you say. When?"

"Monday night. What is it, some kind of secret?"

"No, but—"

"Well, it doesn't matter. I'm gonna see him first thing tomorrow morning, anyway."

"Look, Train—" Randall took a deep breath, his belly rolling out over the cinched pants-belt. "Why don't we call it off, what do you say?"

"I still owe you another day."

"That's all right, keep the change."

"What's the matter? I thought you guys wanted me to run it out to the end."

"What do you mean?"

"See where the weak spots are, see where it falls apart. Isn't that what you hired me for?" I smiled and moved toward the back door and he stepped aside almost nimbly, his heavy lips kneading a word that wouldn't quite form. He'd forgotten for a moment that he knew that I knew. "Funny," I said, looking around from the door, "what a week without a woman will do to a kitchen."

I U-turned on Marsh and when I passed his window he was back on the phone again, his right arm waving wildly in the air.

Bill called me at 11:00 o'clock from the station. He had news. Cruickshank, he said, had a plane he kept at a private airfield named Addles & MacKay's, a little south of Pacifica on the coast.

"What kind of a plane?"

"Addles said it was a beat-up old Stinson, a four-seater."

"You talked to Addles?"

"Yeah. He lives on the field, has an apartment off the hangar. He says our man's been flying out of there for five years."

"Did you tell him you were a cop?"

He paused. "Well, sort of like a private cop."

"Like Brady & Train, huh, Bill?"

"Well, sorta like that. It has a nice ring, don't it? Look, I had to tell him *something* and I didn't want to tell him I was SFPD, did I?"

"Gimme Addles' number."

He recited digits and I wrote them down.

"You gonna call him, Sam?"

"Yeah, I want him to get the name right—*Train & Brady*."

Addles answered after the first ring and I could hear the same newscast in the background that I had on. It gave the conversation a strange stereophonic effect. Addles was genial about it, but suggested that the left hand of Brady & Train didn't know what the right hand was doing, since he'd just talked to my partner. I could feel the partner thing closing in on me inescapably, like one of those errors in a computer credit report. Fated to be. But no, I thought, no.

Addles didn't like Cruickshank terrifically, he told me after we got straightened around, but said he was a good pilot, and since he wasn't running a social club Cruickshank's twenty-five-bucks-a-month rent was as good as the next guy's. "No matter what cargo he flies," he added.

"Which is what?"

"Ashes. He's got a contract with one of those cremation-burial-at-sea outfits—the Mothering Sea Burial Society, I think they call themselves."

"Oh?" The back of my neck turned cold. "How often does he do that?"

"A couple of times a week, depending. But twice this week already, so business must be good, if that's the word I want. But what's this got to do with his missing wife?"

Bill had told him we'd been hired to find her. "Probably nothing. It's just that we like to know the whole picture, Mr. Addles. What time of day does he usually take off?"

"It varies. Yesterday and the day before it was dawn, but with Cruickshank you never know. You got Channel 4 on your set, Mr. Train?"

"Yeah, why?"

"Makes everything sound weird, doesn't it?"

I was at the main office of the Mothering Sea Burial Society in downtown San Francisco when it opened the next morning at 8:30. It consisted of a small splendidly furnished room presided over by a blonde lady smiling seraphically from her desk in front of a photomantic wall scene of the Pacific coast just off the Golden Gate that looked enough like Heaven to do until the real thing comes along.

Celestial music oozed quadriphonically into the room from all four corners. If I'd stayed five minutes longer than I did, I'd have fallen asleep, maybe forever.

I presented myself in the guise of a prospective half pound of ashes and learned among other things that when my time came I'd be "reduced" at their crematorium in Daly City and either taken to sea by boat or flown to sea by a pilot who was also an ordained clergyman. At that point my eyebrows went up, but the ministering angel behind the desk didn't notice. She only became human when I got up and left the place without signing anything.

An hour later I was having coffee with Jack Addles in his office and waiting for Cruickshank to show up. He was scheduled, the lady had told me, for a "memorial" flight this morning. Cruickshank, the ex-car-thief turned sky pilot.

He arrived at 11:15. Addles pointed him out to me as he crossed the runway toward his plane.

I got up and went out and intercepted him. He was a small slender man, not much more than half the size of his brother-in-law. He wore clean denim pants, a nylon jacket, a long-billed baseball cap, tennis shoes, and dark glasses. He carried a flight bag in his right hand and a bouquet of white shasta daisies in his left. He knew who I was at once and told me so. "You're Train, aren't you?" he said. "Marty told me you'd be around."

"Did he tell you why?"

"Sure. You're supposed to find the missing girls. How you doin'?"

"What's in the flight bag?" I said as we stopped by his plane.

He grinned. "You mean 'who,' don't you? It's not them, amigo. God knows where they are."

"Where *might* they be, Cruickshank? Where'd you drop them that God knows about?"

He put the flight bag on the deck of the cabin through the door opening on the right side. The door had been removed from that side. "Well, if God knows," he said, laying the daisies alongside the flight bag, "he ain't telling."

I asked him what the daisies were for.

"Part of the last rites I perform," he said. "I speak a prayer and drop some flowers over with the ashes." He sounded strangely sincere. "It's the least I can do," he added with a faint smile. "And also the most. Wanna come along?"

"Will it lift me?" His beat-up old craft looked about as airworthy as a bag of stones.

"It's carried a bigger cargo than you, amigo."

"How much did the girls weigh, Harry?"

"Itty-bitty things they were, Train. Climb aboard."

The two right-hand seats had been removed recently, the floor bolts still shiny. There was about five and a half feet of deck space where the seats had been, enough for two small uncremated bodies, stacked. But maybe he'd taken them one at a time—he'd gone up both Monday and Tuesday mornings.

Climbing in awkwardly, wondering why for God's sake I was doing it, I studied the floor for signs of blood, or other less agreeable clues of recent human presence. I sat in the seat behind the pilot's and said to Cruickshank as he got in, "How come no door on the right side?"

"For throwing out ashes and flowers," he said reasonably. "I've got a waiver from the FAA for taking it off if you want to see it."

"Never mind."

"The left mag's got a bit of a knock," he said as he settled into his seat, "but don't let it worry you. Just buckle yourself in."

He did things up front and the starter growled, the engine fired and spit and fired again, and there was no more talk between us for the thirty minutes the thing was on. The left magneto did sound faulty, but so did every nut and bolt in the entire airplane. Whether he was a good pilot or not, as Addles had said, his plane was something else again.

We taxied to the end of the asphalt runway and paused long enough for Cruickshank to take three green-plastic bottles, about pint size, from the flight bag, unscrew their caps, and put them in a little sling arrangement he had under the control panel. Then we took off.

Airborne, the old crate became a bird and we bent gracefully right and were over water in no time, the coast looking sharp and clear just below, the water turquoise in the shallows and deep, deep blue farther out. He stayed low, five to six hundred feet, and headed straight to sea on a due west tack before climbing to maybe a thousand and banking gently right again. He was good, at ease with his plane, and I began to relax a little.

He cast a warning glance back at me and then tightened the degree of the turn we were in, took one of the plastic bottles from the sling, leaned far enough to his right to hold the bottle outside the missing door, and shook the ashes loose, a speck or two flying

back in my face. Then he threw three or four daisies out the door and I could see his lips move, his eyes half shut. It was a strange private moment for him, his face again set in sober, sincere lines. I felt like a voyeur at a bedside prayer. But almost as easily, he could have dumped first one of the twins and then the other out that open door, having put them aboard Sunday night, maybe, after Addles had gone to bed. Twenty miles at sea, where we were now, no trace of them would ever reach shore. Fish food. Jaws.

Cruickshank repeated the maneuver twice more, and twice more a speck or two of someone's mortal remains hit me in the face. For a blessing, he tossed the last daisy over his shoulder into my lap. Or was it some kind of warning? His grin as we wheeled back toward land was noncommittal.

After we'd landed and taxied to his mooring and he'd cut the engine, he turned in his seat and said, "See how easy it was, amigo?"

"It must have been a little harder with the bodies, though, Harry. I mean, they weren't like a flask full of ashes, were they?"

"You do what you have to do," he said, shrugging, and for a moment I found myself liking him. He hadn't killed them—he'd just dropped them at sea, probably with a prayer and a flower.

"I hear you're an ordained minister," I said, getting out.

"Right. The Holy Church of the Golden Gate. Cost me fifty bucks and I can marry you if you want, or bury you if you need it."

He lashed his plane to the anchor bolts fixed in the ground and then we stood there for a moment looking at each other. Like Randall, he knew that I knew, but unlike Randall, it didn't make him nervous.

"How'd he kill them?" I said bluntly.

He shrugged again. "He's strong. They wouldn't have been much trouble for him."

"I don't figure him to be smart enough to change a pair of wet pants," I said. "I figure you for deciding what to do with the bodies, and calling in a private eye for a test run and getting rid of the car. Not that it took much brains, Cruickshank."

"So?"

"I'm not walking away from it, Harry."

"What else can you do? Take your change and go home."

He thought it was a stand-off, and from where he stood it looked like one. But not from where I stood. "So," I said quietly, "I want a bigger piece of the action. You and Randall each got forty thou

out of it. I want five from each of you to walk away." Brady, I thought, would approve of that line.

Cruickshank got the flight bag from the plane, zipped it up with the green bottles inside, and began walking toward the parking area. "You're dreaming," he said, but he wasn't so sure any more. "We got forty altogether. And, besides, what've you got to sell?" He stopped and faced me. "The girls left Reno with a bunch of money and haven't been seen since—and never will be again. Neither will their car. What happened is that a couple of hotshots, probably bedroom buddies of theirs, caught 'em as they left town and dumped 'em off in the mountains somewhere. A sad story, but who can say it didn't happen that way? You?"

"You been diddled, Cruickshank." I grabbed him by the arm as he started away. "Yeah, I can say it didn't happen that way and I can prove it. The girls left Reno Sunday morning with *eighty* thousand in cash and I've got a witness who saw them count the money and saw them drive away. Alone. Also, I can prove they arrived at Randall's in one piece, money and all. He paid me with some of their winnings, the jerk. *That's* what I've got to sell, parson, and you look like a buyer to me!"

He spoke an ungodly word softly, as though to himself, but didn't seem too upset. "I figured as much," he said, "knowing Marty. But how could I prove it? He told me forty was the lot and we'd split it down the middle if I'd handle the bodies and the car. I should have left him holding the bag, but I needed the money for a new plane. I need twice that much for the one I want." Calm as a mill pond. He thought this was still part of a test run, that I was a guy on the make.

"How'd he kill 'em, Harry?"

"Strangled 'em. One under each arm, he said, like a couple a rag dolls. They got him mad, he said, sneered at him—said they'd just dropped by to pick up a few things." He shook his head. "Eighty thousand. They would've come to my place next. If they'd come there first, they'd still be alive. It's a close game for all of us, isn't it, Train?"

"Then you dumped them in the sea, right? Did you cremate them first?"

"No. Cremation's too tricky without a death certificate, and takes too long. But shed no tears for those two broads, amigo. They're not worth it and never were. Look," he said, "come with me to Randall's. If we can get another twenty out of him, you can keep five. I can't

handle him alone, I admit that, but you can. You're right, he diddled me and I don't like it. *Five grand, Train.*" He was taking it like a business man. He was cooler than he should have been.

"Where's he work?"

"At this warehouse—China Basin somewhere."

"All right," I said, "let's go into Pacifica. You phone him from there and tell him to meet us at his place at one-thirty. I'll follow in my car."

I began getting edgy on the way into town. The cop in me smelled a bust coming up, but I wasn't a cop any more, I was a PI, and PIs can't tramp all over cop ground. We've got a certain mandate to snoop and pry and ask questions and trail adulterous wives, but that's about all. I needed a cop, a real cop, and there was only one I could call. So while Cruickshank phoned Randall from Pacifica, I phoned Brady—or at least tried to. But no luck. He wasn't home and he wasn't at the station, and I didn't have time to check the bars.

At one-thirty on the dot we were sitting in front of Randall's house in Cruickshank's car, waiting for Randall to show.

"You got a gun?" Cruickshank asked suddenly, not helping at all.

"Not with me."

"Oh, fine! He's got one in there somewhere."

"Don't worry about it. There's not going to be any shooting."

"I don't know, amigo. Last night over the phone he sounded ready to kill you. He's got it in his blood now, remember that. What's two more to him?"

"Yeah, but he'd be all out of pilots in the family. Don't worry about it." Let me worry about it, I thought, being heavy with it just then. I now had Randall figured as close to a breaking point. It was falling apart for him, even more than for Cruickshank, and he didn't have Cruickshank's cool. What I wanted was to get the money out in the open and then collar the both of them. But it would be a problem, with or without a gun. And without a cop. Cruickshank was the least of it. I could carry him under my arm the way Randall had the girls, but Randall himself was another cut of beef—by about a hundred pounds, with a big load of panic ready to break loose.

"There he is," Cruickshank said.

We watched him run his car into the garage behind the house, then we went up to the front door and Cruickshank pushed the bell.

In a minute or two, Randall opened up, wearing his warehouse coveralls and a coat of sweat on his brow.

"What's up?" he said, failing by a mile to sound casual. We walked into the kitchen and I got my nose ready for another shot of vintage grease, but it didn't seem to bother anybody else. Randall turned in the middle of the room, his eyes dark and cloudy. "How come," he said, "was the back door open? You guys've been here before, haven't you? This is some kind of a setup, isn't it, Harry?"

"No," Cruickshank said, but kept his distance. "Look, Marty, we're *all* in on this thing now, so for Chrissakes don't lose your grip. All we want is a fair split."

"You guys've been here before," Randall repeated sullenly. "You guys've been down in the basement. This is a setup."

"No," I said. I took a step toward him and watched a big black .45 automatic come out of his coverall pocket as he took a step back. I stopped and glanced at Cruickshank, who shrugged slightly and turned white. "Put it down, Marty," I said, holding my hands up and open. "We're all friends."

"Some friends," he muttered. Sweat was pouring off his face now and his eyes had a going-going-gone look I'd seen in other men. Slowly he raised the .45 in his right hand until the end of it looked like a sewer pipe and there wasn't a thing I could do about it.

"I got to do this," he said, talking to himself, and then Bill Brady said, "Hold it, Randall! Police!" and we all looked at the alcove to the basement door and Randall said, "Oh, hell," and fired a shot that splintered wood from the frame of the door to the left of Bill's head, and Bill, with his gun an extension of both his hands, fired. Randall went over backward with a hole in his chest and was dead by the time he hit the floor. Then Bill wheeled right until he had a bead on Cruickshank's heart and he said in that good cop voice, "Not a wiggle, Cruickshank!" And Harry sighed once, closed his eyes, and fainted dead away.

"No wonder," I said, "I couldn't get you on the phone."

The lab men, the M.E., the man from the DA's special squad, Lieutenant Jamieson, Brady's immediate superior, the bag of money with fifty-five thousand in it, Randall, Cruickshank, and the lawyer Cruickshank had dragged in had all gone by five o'clock, leaving Bill and me in Randall's house by ourselves. It had gone down as his case and his collar, as why shouldn't it have? After all, Harry was wearing *his* cuffs when they finally hauled him away.

"Let's get the hell out of here and go hoist a few," Bill said. He was both elated and weary, the way you are after a righteous kill. But those weren't the only symptoms he showed of the day's work.

"How come," I said, "you're walking so funny?"

"My feet hurt. Come on, let's get out of here."

"We've still got to find forty-five hundred bucks," I said. I was weary myself from the day's labors, but also a good bit miffed. We'd told Jamieson I'd called Brady to meet us here because the case was getting too big for a mere PI, and as far as anybody knew, including Cruickshank, that was a fact. Anybody but me and Bill. Now he was looking sheepish as well as elated and weary.

"Where was the money?" I said. "In coffee cans?"

"Yeah. He had a cabinet down there with about a dozen three-pound cans in it—a hoarder, the bastard. But the air was heavy with the smell of coffee, so you had to figure some of the cans had been opened, and they were. He wasn't very smart. The money was in five cans with the yellow plastic lids put back. But the smell gave it away." Bill was enjoying the recitation because it put off the big question, which I then asked.

"What were you going to do with it if we hadn't showed up?"

"Oh, I suppose I was going to hide it somewhere else in the house to drive Randall crazy so we could get him for the murders." He wasn't enjoying himself so much any more.

"Sure you were."

"Sam, look, I just wanted to see it all in one bunch."

"Sure you did."

"Hell, you don't think I was going to walk away with it, do you?"

"Not all of it. Just what you've got in your shoes."

"What do you mean?"

"Take 'em off, Bill."

"Oh, hell!" he said, and took his shoes off and then his socks. He peeled two thin packs of hundred-dollar bills off his sweaty feet—forty-three-hundred dollars' worth.

"You can tell Jamieson," I said, "that we found it after they left. Or, better yet, turn it over to Cruickshank's lawyer for his defense. He's not such a bad little guy, after all. I like a guy who faints instead of fights."

"Okay," Bill said, wearily now, all the elation gone. "But nevertheless, you're pretty damn glad I was here, aren't you, Sam?"

"Well, there's that," I said.

But I didn't add, "partner."

The sheriff stared down the long, narrow shotgun structure. There was a pulpit, a preacher behind it taller than any man Brax had ever seen. Cadaverlike, as if he were tied there, nothing about the man seemed to move. Full-bearded, he was dressed in black. Brax could not determine—were his eyes closed? Yuell had been right; it was spooky in heah . . .

A second story that "moves" in more sense than one, by Billie Lee Powers, whose "first story" #615 appeared in just last month's issue . . .

SAINT DADDY

by **BILLIE LEE POWERS**

Sheriff Braxton Utoff Thomason nosed his official car in between a battered old pickup and a Pontiac Catalina.

Switching off the motor, he eyed the deputy beside him. "Now listen, Yuell," he said, "when we git inside tha church, we'll jist quiet-like set down on a back pew, heah? We don't want ta git noticed no more'n we can help. You ready, Dep'tee?"

Yuell Holly histed an eyebrow. "Jist about as ready as I'm gonna git," he drawled. "Brax, I don't like tha look of that spooky ole church one damn bit. Look at that rickety ole sign theah. Says 'Pure White Conscience Temple of Salvation—Reverend Lucas Middleton, God's Mediator.' Sounds like one a them cults or somethin'."

"Well, now, ain't this interestin'?" the sheriff reflected. "A good ole Mis'sippi boy actin' like he's skeered of a little ole country church. We'll play Indian, Yuell. I'll be Chief; you be Brave. Le's go."

They walked tall, this duo—proud. A "some kind a good-lookin'" representation of the law. Brax, his wheat-hued hair setting off his deep tan, and dark mustached Yuell had both swaggered right past the ugly stick with nary a mark to show.

© 1984 by Billie Lee Powers.

Closing in, they were at the door of the church. The little building exuded a sense of apprehension, apparently gleaned no comfort from the surrounding pines—tall, skinny, rooted sentinels, never changing guard. The sheriff carefully pushed the door open a crack and stood looking, listening. Then, very quietly, he pulled the door back shut.

"What's a matter, Brax," Yuell whispered, "ain't we goin' in?"

"We'll wait a few minutes," Brax said, low. "They're prayin' silent, I thank. It's quieter'n a tomb in theah. It's sa gloomy I could'n see much, but theah's 'bout twenty-five of 'em, I figger. All seem ta be jist a settin' theah stiffer'n starch."

Standing on the dusty, sagging front porch, they waited, listening for some sound from within. Yuell was restless, fidgety. "Brax," he whispered, "I thank theah's somethin' wrong in theah. Shoot, them folks might be overcome with tha heat. Look at them dirty ole windows, down tighter'n a coffin lid. Brax, you know they can't be no air-conditionin' in this ole shack—ain't you worried none?"

"Well," Brax talked low again, "I dunno—le's slip on in an' set down; maybe we can make out what's goin' on."

The sheriff pushed the door open and they edged inside. It smelled dank, the air a good fifteen degrees cooler than the Sunday outside. They stood huddled together, goose-bumpy; their eyes slowly adjusting to the dim interior of the church.

"Le's set down ovah theah," Brax whispered, pointing to a backless bench not far from the door.

Seated now, the law did some reconnoitering. These people in this church were indeed "settin' stiff." Brax believed they all had their eyes closed—hell, was they hypnotized? Was they dead, even? Like Yuell said, maybe they was all suffocated. But that could'n be—it was damn near *cold* in heah. How'd they do that, hot as it was outside?

The sheriff stared down the long, narrow shotgun structure. There was a pulpit, a preacher behind it taller than any man Brax had ever seen. Cadaverlike, as if he were tied there, nothing about the man seemed to move. Full-bearded, he was dressed in black. Brax could not determine—were his eyes closed? Yuell had been right; it *was* spooky in heah.

Yuell nudged the sheriff sharply with his elbow, about to voice his own other-world impressions, but before he could get out his first boo the little building reverberated with a thunderous explosion from the pulpit. It was a miracle—had to be! How else to explain

the dancing, prancing, shouting cadaver turned extrovert before their very eyes?

"Awaken, brothers and sisters!" the Reverend Lucas Middleton, God's mediator, boomed. "Awaken now and hear this! The *Lor-ud* has told me all of your sins. I know exactly what these sins *are*, and I know who among you did 'em. *Praise God*, there is salvation for the poor sinning wretches amongst us. Through *me*, God's chosen mediator, your conscience can be *purged*! Yes, praise the *Lor-ud*, it will be *pure white* again, sinners! Pure as the fallen snow!"

The Reverend's arms stopped flailing about and his next words came low, confidential, as if one-on-one he was whispering a delightful secret into their ear. "Brothers—sisters—there's a price on sin. Oh, yes, praise God, there's always a price on sin. But what I'm about to offer you now is a *cut-rate* price on the sins you did this past week. I say cut-rate because the Lord, praise His *name*, will *discount* those sins against you if you do *now* what He told *me* to tell *you* to do."

God's mediator stepped from behind his pulpit and walked to the end of a low altar. Brax was almost certain that no one, including the preacher, was aware of their presence in the church, but he flattened his back tight against the wall, back into the dimness, some deep gut instinct warning him to remain anonymous.

"Sinners," Reverend Lucas said, "the Lord has told me to advise you to come forward now, one at a time. Come—it's your only road to salvation. You must come forth and state your name. You will then speak aloud of your sin. You will leave nothing of it unspoken, for I shall know if you do. Come—salvation is as near as this altar."

A figure arose in the third row from the front and there came a slight shifting of bodies in the pews as the sinner was allowed to pass through. A tall, slender girl of about nineteen emerged into the aisle. Her long brown hair remained perfectly motionless down on her back, so rigidly straight was her trancelike passage to the altar.

Facing the congregation, the girl spoke. "My name is Velma Parker. On Wednesday night after here, I sinned against the Lord and His mediator. I got into a car with a married man."

Falteringly then, but nonetheless graphically, the girl described what took place in the car. In one long run-on sentence, she told all, omitting nothing but the punctuation. Looking neither to right nor left, Snow White Parker then floated back up the aisle and took her seat. No one else in the church had moved or spoken.

"Sweet *Jeesus*, Brax," Yuell whispered, his eyes bulging, "I ain't

never heard nothin' like that spoke right out in church. Ain't that agin tha law, Brax? Shoot, they's little kids in heah."

"Shush up, Yuell—jist hang loose," Brax whispered. "I 'spect these pore younguns has heard it all before. Now keep still. They don't know we're in heah an' I want ta keep it that way. I want ta see jist how far that dirty ole preachuh man'll let this thang go."

A thin little boy, no more than eleven, tops, walked up to the altar. Ramrod straight, he stood, his eyes as glassy as the marbles with which he should have been playing. In a surprisingly loud, clear voice, he said, "My name's Amley Middleton. The preacher's my pa. Yisterday I sinned agin tha Lord an' His mediator. I stole a rubber tire off'n Mr. Charley Hill what lives up tha road. He keeps a big ole stack a tires in his yard. I was aimin' ta fix me a swang with it back in tha woods, but Mr. Charley, he come out an' ketched me stealin' it. He was madder'n blazes an' he grabbed me an' was draggin' me home ta tell m'pa. I couldn't let Mr. Charley do that 'cause I knew Pa'd beat me haf ta death. M'pa beats me somethin' fierce when I ain't even done nothin'."

Reverend Middleton grabbed the boy by the shoulder and whirled him around. "You git ta your seat, boy!" he growled, totally abandoning his former attempt at scholarly speech. "I'm a raisin' you up in tha way you should go, jist like God's Book says a pa's ta do! Now, you *sit!* You've purged your conscience of tha stealin', an' *I'll* be seein' to it you don't do it agin."

Amley struggled and, unable to free himself from his father's strong grasp, suddenly kicked him hard on the shin. "You turn me loose!" he cried. "I ain't near done purgin' yet, an' when I git finished, you'll haf ta whup me right here 'cause I ain't *never* goin' home with you no more! I done murder yisterday, Pa—you *hear me?* I *kilt* ole man Hill an' I buried 'im in that tire pile a his! I tripped 'im down an' I kep' clubbin' 'im with a big ole stick till he was dead! Did'n the Lord tell you that, Pa?"

By the time Sheriff Thomason and his deputy were up the aisle, the boy had stripped off his shirt and flung himself face down on the altar. "Whup me, Pa!" he screamed. "Whup me right here in tha church an' show 'em all how good you're raisin' me up!"

Yuell grabbed the Reverend Middleton's arm and held on. There seemed no real need to restrain him, though, for God's mediator had gone stiff again—blanched, unmoving, his eyes rolled up in his head.

Brax stared at the little bare back on the altar. In all of his sheriffing, he'd never seen the likes of this. The boy's back was

ridged with scar upon scar, and wounds not yet healed were pus-edged. He placed his big hand tenderly on the jerking little shoulder. "You want ta git on up from theah now, son?" he said. "Spect you're not gonna git beat on jist now. Git yur shirt back on, little fella, it's a mite cold in heah."

The sheriff approached the Reverend Middleton. "I'm Sheriff Thomason," he said. "I know you appear ta be in shock an' all—I can relate ta that, bein' as I'm a mite shook up myself. I had'n heard 'bout no killin'. Me an' m'dep'tee come heah, hopin' ta witness that special c'lection we heard you been takin' up on tha first Sunday of evah month. Got word them bucks been stoppin' with *you* 'stead a some place in New O'leans for exorcisin' spirits from alcoholics, like I'z told you been tellin' these folks heah. Rev'run, I admit I'z skeptical 'bout *anybody* bein' took in by a squirrely pun like that. But after seein' yur spicy little sideshow this mornin', I b'lieve these folks'd scratch with tha chickens an' crow at dawn if you tole 'em to."

If the Reverend got the message, he gave no tip. Blank-faced, eyes staring at only the Lord knew what, Yuell's still strong hold on his arm was his only visible means of support.

The sheriff latched onto the Reverend's other arm. "Le's help tha parson ta set down ovah theah, Yuell," he said. "I thank he's puttin' us on, but he ain't goin' nowheah."

Slowly boot-scooting their way across the rough planked floor, they managed to park the zombied Reverend onto a nearby pew. "Now, Rev'run," the sheriff said, "it's my duty ta tell ya what I'm fixin' ta do heah, so try hard ta understan' this. You an' yur boy are gonna be detained till I can check this thang out. Dep'tee Holly'll go ahead an' read you yur rights so's ta avoid any back-sassin' 'bout that later. There'll be no questionin' till I git back, but I *will* put a bug in yur ear as ta how I'd be a passin' tha time if I'z you. I'd be a prayin' some on this child-abuse angle. Now, *theah's* a question tha's bound ta come up."

Sheriff Thomason walked back up to the altar where Amley Middleton sat. Fully clothed now, his blue-cotton shirt once again hiding the shame of his back, the little boy had no means of concealing the naked fear in his eyes.

"Which way, son?" the sheriff asked softly. "Mr. Hill's place—right or left from heah?" The boy mutely pointed a finger, indicating a left turn from the church.

The sheriff gave Yuell a wave. Big-eyed, bigger-eared, the deputy hurried over. "Yuell, you stay heah with tha preachuh an' tha boy,"

the sheriff said. "I'll go hunt that tire pile. Line all these folks up, git names an' addresses, an' shoo 'em on home. Tha Rev run *stays*—an' keep a eye on 'im. Saint Daddy might jist sprout wings an' fly on ta heaven."

"Will do, Sheriff," Yuell said. "Don't worry 'bout a thang. I *tole* you this was a cult—that ole coot's got all these folks brainwashed. Look at 'em—all jist a settin' theah like they still thank they're at prayer service."

At high noon, the Sunday was half trekked when Sheriff Thomason backed his official car from between the pickup and the Pontiac. Brax wished he was headed for home now instead of out looking for a body in a tire stack. His wife and their little Tommy Jon were going for burgers and fries after church. Tommy Jon sure loved his burgers. And Brax double-sure loved Tommy Jon. Back there was a battered little boy who probably wouldn't want a bite of anything this day. Brax fully aimed to haul that old preacher in. The charge might not stick, but at least the old devil would get himself investigated.

About a quarter of a mile up the road, the sheriff spotted it—a shabby little green-sidinged house with a pile of dusty, worn tires in the yard. He zoomed the car smack up to the porch and bailed out.

He gave a loud knock at the front door. Persistently, ever more loudly he knocked, arousing no stir in the house. Around at the back door then, did a no-joke replay. But there was nobody at home there, either.

Brax stood looking at the pile of dirty old tires. Last-mile vintage, every one. Could a boy swing high in one of these? High enough to talk to a God that didn't need a mediator?

Circling the tire pile, Brax could see no sign of a scuffle, no blood, nothing to tally with the boy's claim of murder. *Could* such a runt of a kid drag a grown man in there and hide him? Seeing as how there was only one way to find out, Sheriff Braxton Utoff Thomason started flinging tires.

Five tires down, he felt his heart sink. He stared at the gnarled old hand he'd uncovered, its fingers pointing up to the truth. "Aw, Amley—you pore little buggah," the sheriff said, low, "I'z prayin' sa hard, son, you'd jist made tha whole thang up."

a **NEW** short story by

WILLIAM BANKIER

On Anitra Hagerman's first morning, typing up her first memorandum, she had been told to make an extra copy on blue tissue and to place it in a file on the table beside the window in Mr. Cope's office. The file had one word lettered on it, carefully printed, underlined three times and circled—as if the person with the pen couldn't bear to finish with the simple name and walk away from it: Maggie.

THE MAGGIE FILE

by **WILLIAM BANKIER**

There came a day during the first month of Anitra's employment at EURO-INK when she made so bold as to inquire if she could have a new desk to replace the splintered relic that was snatching at her tights. Her boss, Mr. Cope, went ape.

"That was Maggie's desk!" he moaned. "You can't ask me to get rid of Maggie's desk." He ran his hand over the mottled surface, his eyes flooded with emotion. He almost kissed the oaken monster. If its legs had been fitted with skirts the way the Victorians used to clothe their pianos, Anitra would have had to look the other way. "The desk stays, Miss Hagerman," he said firmly, suggesting that if anything or anybody went, it would be her.

She might go at that. Not just out of EURO-INK, with its half dozen trade publications printed in several languages, but away from England altogether and back across the Atlantic to Canada. Anitra Hagerman had emigrated from Montreal three years ago when she was twenty-two, seduced by a television commercial during a boring episode of *Kojak* when the grandiose detective was at his most arch. The commercial, populated with guardsmen in red

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tunics and dishy young Albert Finneys smiling at her from pub doorways, had made up for her a mind already half inclined to split.

Among the Montreal disenchantments—apart from a francophone political climate that bothered her less than she pretended—were a matched set of parents who thought the sun rose from the part in Anitra's auburn hair. She couldn't get a ten-dollar raise without them taking her out to dinner with two bottles of wine and a Spanish waiter playing "Lagrimas" on a harp balanced on a chair beside the salad. And when she moved into her own apartment to mark her twenty-first birthday and made the mistake of saying the place was somewhat run down, boy did they come in and decorate.

Now, however, she was almost ready to consider to begin to start to think about going back home. The guardsmen in red looked fine from a distance when a hole in the perpetual cloud-cover matched up with the sun and the television crew rushed to capture the phenomenon on film. It was Englishmen as individuals who never failed to let Anitra down. Superficially, they were okay, with their good manners and their interesting celtic faces. But guardsmen or executives or radio disc-jockies—and she had experienced these categories and more—had all been raised, their behavior suggested, before the turn of the Nineteenth Century.

An example was the solicitor, Clive, who invited Anitra to a party on the houseboat he shared with two other young lawyers. It was moored on the Thames in Chelsea near Battersea Bridge and the setting that summer night was magic. But the men—all public-school graduates who had gone on to Oxford or Cambridge—drank heavily and soon became intent on dangerous, boyish games like climbing onto the roof and jumping from one boat to another across yards of water. Several days later, Anitra met Clive after work for a drink and ended up back at the boat. She was astonished to find the debris from the party exactly as she remembered it being left—every bottle and dirty glass, every moldering plate, the overflowing ashtrays, even an opened carton with an inch of rancid orange juice in it.

"God help us," was her comment.

"I know," Clive said. Was he sheepish or smug? "We keep meaning to get somebody in to clean it up."

A similar lack of attachment to the real world placed the bosses Anitra tried to please in a different category from the menschen she had worked for on the other side of the ocean. The job interview was always promising—superficial courtesy is London's pride. The day-

to-day situation was something else. Perhaps it stemmed from the emphasis on military discipline that still permeates British life—after all, the Empire is not that long gone. And schools in England, alone in Europe, are only reluctantly giving up the practice of hitting children with leather straps to make them behave. Not only is it policy to hit children, but a large body of public opinion thinks it bizarre to suggest there is another way to motivate kids.

Whatever the reason, many English executives expect humble obedience from the women who work their word processors and make their tea. Sometimes subtle, sometimes crass, evidence is always being produced—I am the emperor, you are the slave.

"Type these letters again, Miss Hagerman, with more space at the top. And please make sure there are *ginger* biscuits for my tea tomorrow."

"Yes, Captain Bligh."

The day of the desk was not the first time Anitra had heard Mr. Cope refer to Maggie. On her initial morning, typing up her first memorandum, she had been told to make an extra copy on blue tissue and to place it in a file on the table beside the window in Mr. Cope's office. The file had one word lettered on it, carefully printed, underlined three times and circled—as if the person with the pen couldn't bear to finish with the simple name and walk away from it: Maggie.

The file was fat with blue copies. Each item of business that went through the office sloughed off a tissue which ended up in the Maggie file. And every once in a while as the working day ended, Mr. Cope placed the file in his briefcase with affectionate care and took it away with him. In the morning, it would be back in place on the table.

The mystery didn't cause Anitra any loss of sleep—unlike the question of how much longer she could go on working for one-third the money she would be paid for the same job in Montreal while forking out double the Canadian rate in rent for a three-room flat. But she was interested when Cedric Simpson brought up the subject over lunch in the Rose and Fungus.

"Has Harry been going on about Maggie?"

"Harry?"

"Harry Cope, your employer."

"Oh. I never knew his first name, I thought it was Sir. Yes, there

was weeping and gnashing of teeth when I suggested replacing her desk with something built in this century."

"The man is obsessed with Maggie. Has been for years." Cedric bent his head to the giant sausage on his plate beside an Everest of mashed potato and four score slices of boiled carrot. The English like their food at midday. Ced Simpson, with his curly black hair and his well shaped beard and moustache, reminded Anitra of history-book pictures of Sir Walter Raleigh. He was one of EURO-INK's translators, responsible for the French editions of several publications. He was the best masculine company she had discovered this side of Newfoundland. She had toyed with the idea of bringing him home some night, risking this valuable friendship on the chance of gaining a lover. "I could tell you things about Harry Cope and his precious Maggie," he said. "I think she knows where the bodies are buried."

"Say on." Anitra pushed aside her salad and picked up her glass of white.

"Her name is Margaret Trubshawe," Cedric began. "She originated in the south London area somewhere—Mitcham, Morden, Wimbledon. That's where she and our Harry came together many years ago, working for an obscure one-man publishing concern. Run by a person named Alexander Millichip."

"How do you know all this?"

"Christmas parties. Harry and myself into the grape. Last Christmas in particular he was mourning the absence of his departed Maggie."

"Go on."

"Millichip used to publish a cluttered little monthly called *Whose Garden Is It, Anyway?* It featured a section of advertising for gardening supplies such as Manure of the Month and plastic portable greenhouses. Harry Cope joined as a young man, one of his first jobs, to edit the book. Maggie came in on the same day, I understand, as a sort of typist/bookkeeper/answer the phone/make the tea/write placating letters to angry readers who have sent in their money, now where is my sack of dung?"

"Sounds familiar."

"The Cope-Trubshawe relationship blossomed from the start. Harry needs a lot of looking after and Maggie is a natural owner-organizer. They had something like fifteen years together down there in Wimbledon before the gardening enterprise wilted and they moved up here to EURO-INK as a team. In his five years with our

firm, Harry has worked his way up to his present position, bringing along his secretary with him."

Anitra finished her wine and refused another glass. "If they were so close, why isn't Maggie still at her desk?"

"I asked Cope that question. Personal reasons was the stern reply."

"But still he goes and sees her with a file of company business."

"That is vintage Maggie-Harry. He never made a move, business or personal, without discussing it with her."

"Sounds eccentric to the point of institutionalization," Anitra said, feeling a little better about the fruitcake she was working for. "And I believe every word of it."

"If your polysyllabic representation means," Cedric retaliated, "that you think they're mad, you could be right. Certainly Maggie is some sort of religious fanatic."

"Is that where the—?"

"The framed mottos on the office wall? Yes, she presented them to Harry and he hung them himself." Cedric's eyes went vacant as he recalled one for quoting: "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works."

Anitra responded with the one she had been staring at that morning. "'Oh ye ice and snow, bless ye the Lord; praise Him and magnify Him forever.'" She raised her eyebrows. "I wonder what it means."

"I used to sing those words as a choirboy: They're from the Benedicite, part of the Anglican service."

"You're a choirboy?" Anitra emphasized her disbelief by stroking the grain of his beard with the backs of her fingers.

"I was not always as diabolical," he responded quietly, "as you see me now."

Mr. Cope was in a mood that afternoon. A managers' meeting had been called on short notice for five o'clock. It was something crucial having to do with an esoteric change in European Community regulations which could affect the company's trading conditions on the continent. The executives would be in the building till midnight. From the way her boss kept dialing an outside line, then putting down the telephone moments later, Anitra decided he was trying urgently to make contact with Maggie.

As he left his office on his way to the executive suite, Anitra decided to have a go. "Mr. Cope, would you like me to complete the telephone call you were trying to make?"

He had a bulging, florid face under an overhang of white hair,

like Santa Claus with a bellyache. The perpetual frown lifted. She had made a lucky strike. Obviously, he couldn't bring himself to speak to his former secretary in front of his fellow brass.

"Would you be so kind?" he said, scribbling a number on her pad. "Miss Trubshawe. Tell her the situation and say I'll ring tomorrow."

It required less than five minutes' thought for Anitra to decide to do something more audacious. An explanation tomorrow would be demanded by Mr. Cope and he might not accept whatever she would tell him. So what? She was ready to go back to Canada anyway—more ready than ever after the disturbingly intimate lunch with Cedric Simpson.

She could remember having seen a copy of an old staff roster somewhere in the desk, had browsed it once a few days after joining the company, musing over the exotic names and addresses. The yellowed pages came to hand. She searched and found Trubshawe, M. There was a street address in Chelsea. The phone number tallied with the one written down by Mr. Cope. The mysterious Maggie was in residence at the same location.

At half past five, Anitra took the Maggie file from the table in the inner office and stored it in her totebag beneath her knitting and her copy of *I, Claudius*, which she was reading for the fifth time. Her telephone rang as she moved through the doorway.

"It's me." Cedric sounded still comfortable from lunch. "I've been thinking of all the things I didn't say to you in the pub."

"We talked for hours."

"And only got close. What are you doing now?"

"Just going out the door."

"Wait one minute and I'll go with you."

"Sorry, Cedric, not tonight."

"Not tonight forever? Or not tonight tonight."

She gave his question the most important five seconds' consideration in her life so far. "Not tonight tonight," she said.

Margaret Trubshawe opened the door of her Chelsea basement flat wearing a floral caftan that looked as if it had been made to be worn by Demis Roussos and Peggy Lee at the same time. Anitra understood instinctively, as she stood at the foot of seven concrete steps with the King's Road traffic snarling in the near distance, the reason why Maggie had given up going to the office. Fat.

"Yes?" A face within a face smiled out uncertainly.

"Maggie?" The name sprang unexpectedly from Anitra's lips. What the hell, her Canadian accent would excuse the intimacy.

"Yes?" The smile dissolved through a dozen grades of expression ending in expectation.

"I'm Anitra Hagerman, your replacement. I work at EURO-INK," she explained. "For Mr. Cope."

"Oh, yes." Now her features composed themselves into a neutral frown. Maggie was getting ready not to like her visitor.

"May I come in for a minute?" It was obviously not going to become a social occasion, but having journeyed this far Anitra didn't intend to run away after less than a minute in the presence of the mystery lady.

"Sorry." As she let Anitra in, Maggie dropped the word the English use more than any other. It means everything and nothing. I stepped on your toes, I accidentally took your place in the queue, I stole your husband, your house blew up with your children inside, we sank your cruiser that was going the other way . . . Technically, "sorry" conveys apology without involving the emotions. It is enough.

Maggie closed the door behind them, brushed past Anitra like an escaped weather balloon, and led the way into a sitting room that seemed small with her in it. "Sorry," she said again, unnecessarily.

Not having been asked, it gave Anitra pleasure to say: "I won't sit down. I've brought you something from Mr. Cope's office. He was called into an executive meeting which may last all evening. He tried ringing you but there was no reply."

"I was in the bath," Maggie said.

Anitra tried to imagine the bath that would accommodate Miss Trubshawe. The nearest one was Wembley Pool. No wonder she couldn't make it to the telephone in time. "I know you like to get your copies," she said, lifting the file from her bag and placing it on an upholstered settee long since beaten into a hammock.

Maggie beamed at the file as if it was the Christmas present she knew she didn't want. "How kind of you. Thank you very much." Her diction had become extremely Roedean, echoing with plummy English dismissal.

Anitra looked around the room. On a near wall she saw a number of framed photographs. A slender, pretty girl was central to all of them. "Ah, your gallery." She went to the pictures, smiling.

Maggie had no choice but to follow her. "Evidence of a misspent youth," she said.

"You look terrific. And is this—yes it is, it's Mr. Cope." Anitra studied a dark-haired, callow version of her boss.

"We've been together a long time. That was taken in the garden behind the office in Wimbledon. We used to lunch outside on fine days, under the willow tree." There was, indeed, a willow in the background. "The man between me and Harry is Mr. Millichip. He was our employer."

With a remark about those having been the days, Anitra turned to go. As she left the room, she passed an alcove dimly illuminated by the flames of two candles. They flanked an oil painting of Jesus Christ mounted on the wall above an oak *prie-dieux* with a leather kneeling-pad deeply impressed by frequent use.

Outside and walking toward the bus stop, Anitra brought with her a strong sense of things not being as they should be. Maggie and Cope carrying on their relationship through all these years—that was okay. She could even accept the former secretary's wish to see the office paperwork—perhaps they hadn't that many things to talk about.

But there was something else. The excessive overweight. The surprising emphasis on religion. What was behind it all? Anitra wished now that she had made that date to see Cedric tonight. She wanted badly to talk to him—at the very least. Was she too proud to telephone him at home and say she'd changed her mind?

"I like your apartment," Anitra said.

"Grateful for the chance to show it to you," Cedric replied. With grace and talent, he had extended his lonely meal into dinner for two, served at a table by a window looking out on a neat rectangle of paving stones, grass, and roses, red and white.

"You said something intriguing today about Margaret Trubshawe." They were having coffee now. "You said she knows where the bodies are buried and that's why Cope maintains this close relationship with her."

"The two of them were thick as thieves while she was still coming to work. And they go back for decades." Cedric gave her an admiring glance. "You actually took that file and went and knocked on her door."

"I had to get a look at her. I can see one reason why he started up with her. She must have been a beautiful woman before she put on weight."

"She'll tell Harry you came around."

"Of course."

"And you're not worried about his reaction?"

"I need something to shake me loose."

"From EURO-INK?"

"From the British Isles. I'm seriously considering catching the noon balloon for Saskatoon."

He came back from clearing away the cups and the silver percolator. "If you go back to Canada," he said, "you'll spoil all the plans I have for us."

"Then get going, Mr. Simpson," she advised him.

It was one o'clock in the morning when the idea got the best of Anitra. It was now an obsession. "I can't sleep," she said in her normal speaking voice, which made echoes in his high-ceilinged bedroom.

He wasn't that far under, either. "What's the problem?"

"Harry and Maggie. Something happened with them years ago. Down there in Wimbledon."

"Good for them." Cedric snapped on the bedside lamp and gave her his Seventeenth Century fencing-master smile. "I liked it when it happened to me."

With her head on his chest, trying to read the clock on the dresser at the foot of the bed, she said: "No, I mean something devious: I have an overpowering suspicion that they and this publisher they worked for—"

"Alexander Millichip."

"—that something happened involving the three of them. I have nothing concrete to go on, just this hunch. She has a photograph on her wall of herself and Harry and Millichip in the garden behind their old office. Harry and Maggie weren't looking at the camera, they were looking at their boss."

"Your cheek feels soft and warm."

"I think we should drive down to Wimbledon and look around."

"Your voice makes vibrations in my sternum."

"I know it must be late but that's the best time. We won't be seen."

"I am yours to command, lady."

"You insatiable animal." Anitra pretended to be annoyed. "Now I can't see the clock."

It was half past two when Cedric whizzed across Putney Bridge, up the hill and along the Parkside, three miles farther beside the

Common, and finally wheeled his car onto Wimbledon High Street. All the shops were dark. "According to that ancient telephone book," he said, "Millichip Publishing was located on the Ridgway."

"And according to this A to Z," Anitra said, examining a page of her street directory by the dashboard light, "the Ridgway runs off the far end of the High Street."

"Bingo." Cedric slowed down and made a right. "This looks semi-residential. They must have been working out of the old boy's home."

"Look at all the places boarded up."

"I read something about this area. Urban redevelopment going on. Some of the locals don't like it, but it seems they're getting an outburst of modern office buildings come what may."

"Stop a minute," Anitra said. "There's a plaque of some kind beside that front door." She got out of the car and walked with quiet steps halfway down the footpath leading to a broad doorway framed by pillars needing paint. The windows were blind behind plywood panels. Anitra read the sign and went back to the car. "Millichip Publishing," she reported. Then she put on a vaudeville comedian accent. "Dis must be da place."

"Your intuition has brought us here," Cedric said, his hands nervously fondling the steering wheel. "Now my sense of self-preservation suggests we drive rapidly away."

"Switch off the headlights. We're going in."

"Goodbye, my love. Have you got cab fare?"

Anitra plucked the keys from the ignition and dropped them into her jacket pocket. "Follow me," she said. "I see a laneway beside the house. We may not even have to break in."

"Glad to hear it." He followed her closely enough to keep a hand on her waist.

A combination of orange light from the nearest street lamp and pale-white illumination from a full moon allowed them, as they entered the garden behind the deserted house, to see dimly the layout of the place. Anitra got her bearings.

"I recognize this from the photo on Maggie's wall. They were standing in front of that tree." She moved toward it through uncut grass. "Right about here."

"If I were a water-diviner, I would dig the well exactly here." She swept a shoe through tall, damp grass, felt the hard ground beneath. Then her eye caught sight of a pale flash on the trunk of the tree. "Let's have your lighter, Cedric."

He produced a flame and held it where she indicated. Carved in

the bark was a rough but recognizable cross. "What do you make of that?" he breathed.

"I'm not sure." Then she surprised herself by intoning: "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works."

"Miss Hagerman, will you come in here, please?"

"Yes, Mr. Cope."

She found him sitting behind his desk with the Maggie file on his lap. "You won't need your dictation pad," he began and she sensed with relief that she would never need it again. "I'm told you went to see Miss Trubshawe."

"Yes. You were trying to reach her and I knew you wouldn't be able to ring from the meeting."

"A telephone call would have sufficed. You didn't have to go round."

"I'm sorry if I did the wrong thing."

"I keep my business affairs separated from my private affairs." Each word was combed and brushed. "You have gone too far, Miss Hagerman."

"Farther than you think. Last night I went to Wimbledon."

That stopped him. "Why? What—?"

"I have the whole story now," she said, telling a lie. "The cross carved on the tree trunk was the final giveaway. Maggie's idea, the cross, I imagine," Anitra said, glancing at the religious mottos on the wall.

"I warned her not to carve the cross." Cope's eyes wandered far away. "But she insisted on it. We owe the old man that much, she said. He's dead and buried, the least we can do for him now is put a Christian marker on his grave."

"I know all that," Anitra led him on, her head reeling. "But why kill poor old Mr. Millichip? One day you're posing for the photographer beside the willow, the three of you. Next thing, you're doing him in."

After a pause, Cope said: "He put his hands on her." The florid face hardened. "New Year's Eve—we were having a few drinks. I went out to buy more liquor at the off-license. When I came back, they were— He had her clothing disarranged. Disgusting old man, kissing my Maggie. She wasn't his—Christ, his *teeth* weren't even his. I took him by the throat and shook him around the room and by the time she got me to let go, he was—"

Anitra waited for him to continue. When he didn't, she said: "So

you dug the grave and put him in it. And Maggie said some prayers and carved the cross on the trunk of the tree. What puzzles me is how you managed to keep it quiet. How you got away with it. Till now."

"He had no family. No friends. The publication was his entire life. Maggie was the bookkeeper, she was able to arrange things with the bank. She typed a few memos to printers and distributors, I forged his signature on various checks and papers. The story was that Millichip had closed the business and gone to Australia. There wasn't a lot of money, anyway. We took what little there was and used it to get ourselves established here in London."

Anitra was studying the framed religious statements. "Oh ye ice and snow, bless ye the Lord," she read aloud. "I think I understand that one now."

The old executive nodded absently. "It was the mildest December in years. The ground was soft when we dug Millichip's grave. Then the next day, as if the Lord was on our side, it turned cold and it snowed until March. Covered everything up. When it thawed, the ground was bleached and level."

"The Lord was never on your side over a crime like that," Anitra said. "That's how I happened to come all the way from Canada to work for you and find you out."

This theory seemed to please Harry Cope. He appeared relieved. "What are you going to do now?" he asked.

"Two things. I have to tell the police, of course."

"Of course you do."

"And then I'm going home."

Cedric was at his desk translating an obscure technical piece into French when Anitra came in and sat down facing him. "I've just heard a confession from Mr. Cope." She went on to tell him the whole story.

"Brilliant. Case closed." Cedric considered the matter. "Leaves you without a boss."

"Which fits in perfectly, since I plan to be back in Montreal before the Expos blow the pennant."

"I won't even ask what *that* means," the Englishman said. "I'll miss you like mad."

"No, you won't. You're coming, too. They need good translators in Montreal. A bloke like you with your impeccable English and your command of French, you can write your own ticket."

Cedric Simpson lifted his eyes to a new and bright horizon. "I never thought of such a thing," he said.

"Think of it now. We'll make plans over supper at my place."

Back at her desk, Anitra telephoned the police, gave an initial statement, and made arrangements to come in and be interviewed later in the morning. Then she put together a memorandum top sheet with carbons and white tissues and a blue tissue on the bottom. Cranking the sheaf into her machine, she began to type.

"Memo to Mr. H. Cope

"From A. Hagerman

"Following our discussion this morning, this is to confirm my resignation from EURO-INK one month from today. I have given part of the story we talked about to the police and will complete the account later this same day.

"May I be blunt? I like a lot of things about England and the English—the beauty of the land, the buildings, the ceremonials, the good manners, the desire to see fair play. But I despise the hypocrisy, the submerging of healthy human emotions under thick layers of tweedy formality.

"So I am going back to Canada where people have learned (mostly from their cousins in the USA) to say what is on their minds. You are a murderer, Mr. Cope, and your girl friend Maggie is an accessory before and after the fact and you both belong in prison.

"But I saw something in your face this morning that tells me you are not vile. You regret your crime and you don't mind paying for it. I suspect you have been in a kind of prison ever since it happened. And now, at last, you have been set free."

Anitra rolled the memorandum from her machine, signed the top copy, initialed the blue tissue, and carried the papers into the inner office. Cope was not there. She centered the memo on his desk and then, after a thoughtful pause, opened the Maggie file and placed the blue copy inside.

Then she went back to her desk and got busy with the telephone, making travel arrangements for herself and Cedric.

"Q"

a **NEW** Captain Leopold story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

"Captain—" One of the guards approached Leopold and Connie. "We found a woman unconscious in the ladies' room. She says another woman knocked her out and stole her dress . . ."

CAPTAIN LEOPOLD AND THE MYSTERY WOMAN

By **EDWARD D. HOCH**

Norman Wilkie wasn't the partying type. As vice-president of Video Pastimes at the age of forty-six, he'd been thrust into a young man's industry that reflected a lifestyle completely alien to his own. He'd never smoked pot, and a single glass of white wine was generally enough to make him dizzy. Now he and his wife Martha had driven to a neighboring Connecticut city for the unveiling of a new product—a silicon chip of amazing capacity, capable of revolutionizing the video-game and computer industries. And with the unveiling went yet another lavish cocktail party.

"Jim Tarco's wife tells me this place is guarded like Fort Knox," Martha remarked as she accepted a glass of champagne from a passing waiter. She was wearing the bright-red party dress she'd bought especially for the occasion. "That design is worth millions."

Norman sipped at his own drink. "Having a lavish party like this to introduce a new product isn't my way of doing things. In the old days, a salesman would call at the office with his catalogue. Now they deluge us with drink and food and expect us to sign on the dotted line." He looked around distastefully as a couple jostled him in passing. The hotel ballroom was filling rapidly.

"Jim thinks it'll revolutionize Video Pastimes."

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"And it will. We can charge the arcade kids fifty cents a play instead of a quarter."

At the far end of the room they could see two uniformed security guards standing before closed accordion doors. Martha finished her champagne. "Did you bring the invitation, Norman?"

He patted his jacket pocket. "It's right here."

A couple of the younger technicians from the company came by and Norman introduced them to Martha. "That one's cute," she remarked when they'd moved on.

"I'm beginning to think you like this partying business."

"It could grow on me," she teased him. "I'd better go off to the ladies' room before they open the doors."

He watched her red dress and blonde hair disappear into the crowd before turning his attention to the newest arrivals. Jim Tarco, thirty-two-year-old president of Video Pastimes, had just entered with his wife, Beth. "Where's Martha?" she asked Norman.

"Ladies' room. She'll be right back."

"See you inside," Tarco said, steering Beth through the crowd. Norman guessed there were close to two hundred people in the ballroom by now, counting the press.

The minutes dragged by and he wondered what was keeping Martha. Had she gone back upstairs to their room for something she'd forgotten? Finally, just as the guards began opening the accordion doors, he caught a glimpse of her blonde hair and red dress moving through the crowd toward him. "I'm back, honey."

"It's about time. They're just about to—"

The words froze in his throat as he stared at her face. The dress and hair were Martha's, all right, and the face bore a general resemblance to hers, but this woman was a stranger!

She leaned close to him and whispered, "If you want to see her alive, don't say a word. We're going into that room together."

"Who are you? Where's—"

"Not a word, or she's dead. Move."

His legs were like rubber. He made it across the ballroom as best he could, with this strange caricature of Martha clinging to his arm. The security guard asked for their invitation and carefully checked their names from the list. Then they were inside.

He glanced around quickly, searching in vain for a familiar face. But only Jim and Beth Tarco would really spot the impostor. No one else here had met Martha for more than a few seconds. And the Tarcos were lost somewhere in the crush of people.

"The microscopes," the voice in his ear instructed, and he noticed for the first time that a line of powerful microscopes had been arranged on a long table. The guests were taking turns looking through the eyepieces, studying the intricate layered design of the new computer chip.

"I don't—" He started to protest but the woman guided him up to the nearest microscope, interrupting a long-haired young man who muttered something uncomplimentary under his breath as he stepped aside.

Norman Wilkie bent to adjust the eyepiece, but the woman wasn't interested in that. She reached onto the microscope's stage and plucked the silicon chip away. One of the security guards saw her at once and started forward, raising his hand. Coolly she dropped the chip into Martha's purse and when her hand reappeared it was holding a little .22 caliber automatic. She pointed it at the ceiling and fired two quick shots, turning the room into a sea of panic.

As people backed away, and the guards found it impossible to reach her, Norman took a step forward. "Give me that," he said.

She backed away a few steps and fired a quick but careful shot into his right thigh. As he collapsed onto the floor, he heard some of the women screaming.

Lieutenant Fletcher glanced up from his desk as Leopold entered the squadroom. "How's married life, Captain?" he asked.

"Pretty much the same as single life *this* week," Leopold answered with a grin. "Molly's attending a New England lawyers' conference in Boston all week."

Fletcher was about to follow up with a remark about wishing his wife would go away for a week, but they were interrupted by Sergeant Connie Trent. "Something's happened over at the Parkside Hotel. Robbery and a shooting."

Fletcher started to rise, but Leopold said, "I'll take it. Go out and get some dinner."

When he and Connie reached the hotel, the second-floor ballroom was still in a state of confusion. "A man was shot in the leg by his wife," a patrolman told them. "Only he says it wasn't his wife. Want to see him before they take him down to the ambulance?"

Leopold nodded and they followed the patrolman to a stretcher just being carried into an elevator. "Can you tell me what happened?" he asked the middle-aged man, who seemed to be in some pain.

"They took my wife. Find her, for God's sake!"

"Who took her?"

"They substituted this woman—she had Martha's dress and purse!"

"All right, I'll talk to you later," Leopold said, letting the elevator doors close.

"Captain—" One of the guards approached Leopold and Connie. "We found a woman unconscious in the ladies' room. She says another woman knocked her out and stole her dress."

"Let's go see her," Leopold said.

The blonde woman, close to hysterics, identified herself as Martha Wilkie, wife of the wounded man. Someone had given her a tablecloth to cover her undergarments and she clutched it around herself as she spoke. "I left my husband in the ballroom and came here to the ladies' room. She must have followed me in but I didn't notice her at first. As I stepped into a toilet stall, she forced her way in after me and pressed a nerve in my neck. That's the last thing I remember until I woke up in my underwear with a policeman standing over me."

"What did the woman look like?"

"She had blonde hair and she was about my height. That's all I really saw. Can you take me to my husband?"

Leopold glanced at Connie and she took over the conversation. "Your husband is all right, he's going to be fine, but he suffered a minor flesh wound in the leg. He's been taken to the hospital. We'll have a squad car take you there."

"I'd better go to my room for my other dress." Martha dug around in her purse for the key. "Lucky we were staying here and I have something else to wear."

"I'll go with you," Connie said.

Leopold found one of the patrolmen and listened to an account of what had happened. "After this woman shot Wilkie, where'd she go?"

The patrolman shrugged. "The security guards swear she didn't leave the floor, but she's not here now."

"I want to talk to someone in charge," Leopold decided. "Who's head of security?"

He ended up with two people—Simon Dolff, president of the firm giving the presentation, and Roddy McLain, a uniformed man in

charge of the hired security unit. After the introductions, Leopold asked McLain, "Are you employed by Mr. Dolff or the hotel?"

Simon Dolff, a little man with a moustache and a surprisingly deep voice, interrupted McLain to answer the question himself. "He works for me. I hired six uniformed guards to augment the hotel's regular security staff. A lot of good it did me!"

Leopold gestured toward the holstered revolver on McLain's belt. "Is that real?"

The security guard shook his head. "Just for show. Guards with firearms licenses cost more."

"So there was nothing you could do when this woman drew her weapon."

Roddy McLain shrugged. "We couldn't have done anything anyway. We couldn't have fired into a crowd of two hundred people."

"But how could she have disappeared?"

"People were screaming after she shot Wilkie. She ran out of the ballroom and I took off after her, but by the time I reached the hall she was nowhere in sight. The hotel's security man was by the elevators and he swore she didn't come that way."

"What about the stairs?"

"The only stairs on this side are the fire stairs, but an alarm sounds if the fire door is opened—it's a security measure to discourage thieves from prowling around—and no alarm went off."

"Just how valuable is this stolen computer chip?" Leopold asked, turning his attention back to Simon Dolff.

"We believe the high-capacity design of it to be unique in the industry. It has tremendous potential and puts us far ahead of anything the Japanese are developing. Once on the market, it'll be easy enough to copy, but right now, six months ahead of its general availability, there are companies who'd pay a quarter of a million dollars to obtain one. A single week's orders would earn back their investment."

"Wouldn't it have been easier to simply photograph it with a miniature camera?"

"No. The circuits are in layers, made by a special bonding technique. A photograph would show little of real value. Likewise, a look through a microscope showed little, but we felt it was good public relations."

"And the security guards were mainly for show?"

"In a sense, Captain, though of course we were trying to prevent theft and unauthorized gate-crashing."

"Any idea who this woman was working for?"

He shrugged. "Possibly the Japanese, or a rival American company. Or a freelancer interested in selling our chip to the highest bidder."

But Roddy McLain, the security guard, was interested in more immediate matters.

"How'd she get off the floor? Maybe she's still hiding here, Captain. The blonde hair could have been a wig. Hell, it might even have been a man dressed as a woman."

"It might," Leopold conceded. "But why did she shoot Norman Wilkie in the leg? If he could identify her, she'd have killed him. If he couldn't, why harm him at all? He wouldn't have tried to stop her, not with his wife's life in danger."

Connie reappeared and hurried toward them. "Mrs. Wilkie's on her way to the hospital."

"Good," Leopold said.

"I spoke with a man named Jim Tarco and his wife. He's president of the firm that employs Wilkie. They're going to the hospital to see him."

"Did they see Mrs. Wilkie?"

"No, I'd already put her in the squad car."

Leopold started toward the ladies' room where Martha Wilkie had been found.

"What now?" Connie asked, following.

Leopold brushed past the fingerprint technicians and police photographers and went into the stall where Martha Wilkie had been found. Without hesitation, he lifted the top of the toilet tank and extracted a rolled-up red dress, partly soaked with water. As he did so, a tiny automatic pistol slipped from the folds of material and clattered onto the marble floor.

"There it is," Leopold announced, but there was no triumph in his voice.

Connie simply stared at the dress and gun, uncomprehending.

"That's how our mystery woman got off the floor, Connie—with a police escort. You even provided her with a ride in a patrol car. But not to see her husband, I'm sure. The real Martha Wilkie is still among the missing."

Later in the evening, Leopold called Connie and Fletcher into his office for an update.

"Where do we stand now on this case?" he asked.

"I just had a report on Mrs. Wilkie," Fletcher replied. "She was found drugged and unconscious in the back seat of a car in the hotel's underground parking garage. The car had been stolen."

"Is she all right?" Connie asked

"They're checking her over at the hospital. She's regained consciousness and seems fine."

"How did they get her to the car?" Leopold wondered.

"I think I've figured out that angle," Connie said. "After you discovered the dress and gun in the ladies' room, I had another talk with the hotel security man stationed by the elevators. He remembered that shortly before the robbery and shooting, a man helped an obviously ill woman into an elevator. He was practically carrying her, the hotel detective said. He hadn't bothered to mention it earlier because it happened before the robbery."

"That's it," Leopold decided with certainty. "I think I can outline exactly what happened."

"Shortly before five o'clock, Wilkie and his wife left their room on the ninth floor and took the elevator to the second-floor ballroom. This woman and her accomplice had previously selected Martha Wilkie as the wife they could most easily impersonate. When Martha left her husband, the impostor chloroformed her in the ladies' room and the accomplice got her down to the garage on the pretense she was ill and must be taken home. The impostor took her red dress and purse and returned to the ballroom to rejoin Wilkie, warning him to say nothing. She stole the silicon chip and shot Wilkie in the leg simply to remove him from the scene. Then, knowing escape from the second floor might be impossible after those shots, she ducked back into the ladies' room. The red dress and gun went into the toilet tank and she pretended to be unconscious when they found her."

"Naturally, we accepted her as the real Mrs. Wilkie. Norman Wilkie was no longer on the scene to denounce her and the others hardly knew her. If anyone thought the rescued woman looked like the thief—well, that was the idea of the impersonation in the first place. Psychology was on her side, too. We'd hardly suspect someone we found unconscious and half naked of being the thief we were looking for."

"But what if Mrs. Wilkie hadn't left her husband's side?" Connie asked

"They'd have managed to call her away for a phone call or something."

"By the time I reached the patrol car on the radio," Fletcher told them, "they had dropped the impostor off at the hospital. Of course, she never went near Wilkie's room."

"Even if they'd actually escorted her to his room, she'd have found a way to elude them," said Leopold. "A stop in another ladies' room, for instance."

"And the missing computer chip was with her all the time," Fletcher grumbled. "Why didn't we tumble to it sooner?"

"Because it was such a complex plan," Leopold suggested. "Certainly there were simpler ways for them to steal the chip. It's almost as if they wanted to make a game of it—a puzzle."

"Most criminals go for the easiest way," Connie observed. "Who would even think of such a complicated scheme?"

It was the following morning before they had their answer to that question. It came in the mail, in a plain white envelope addressed to Captain Leopold. The message inside was direct and to the point:

Did you enjoy it?—J. Dermain

Leopold stared at it, uncomprehending at first. Then suddenly he remembered, and called Fletcher and Connie in.

Connie scanned the note and recalled the name at once. "That Frenchman who was in the game-and-puzzle business! He rented out his talents for criminal purposes. He's the one who concocted that bizarre scheme to discredit the Congressional candidate on the eve of the special election. And we heard he once trained poisonous snakes to crawl through a garden maze and kill a man in Ireland. But he was murdered in New York three years ago!"

Leopold nodded. "Jules Dermain. There's no doubt that he's dead, but someone has resurrected his name and possibly his methods. I think the note is taking credit for yesterday's robbery at the hotel. That computer chip can be used in video games. One of Dermain's old associates could be involved in this."

"That's a long shot," Fletcher said.

"I know, and it's probably a wild-goose chase, but let's check it out. Dust the note for fingerprints too. I'm going over to the hospital to talk with Norman Wilkie."

The bullet in Wilkie's leg had missed the bone and the doctors had removed it without trouble. He was sitting up in bed when Leopold arrived, chatting with the real Martha Wilkie. She was a bit older and not quite as attractive as her impersonator, but there

was a general resemblance. It wouldn't have fooled anyone who knew her, but in a room full of two hundred people the deception would have worked until she ran into friends or colleagues of the Wilkies.

"How are you feeling, Mrs. Wilkie?" Leopold asked when they'd been introduced.

"Fine, thank you. And the doctor says Norman can go home tomorrow. I guess we're both pretty lucky."

"Could you tell me exactly what happened to you? We already have your husband's story."

"I was on my way to the ladies' room. I'd just asked directions and stepped into the corridor when a man came up behind me so quickly I never got a good look at him. He pressed a cloth over my face and nose. That was the last thing I really remember, though I was vaguely aware of being helped into an elevator before I passed out."

"Have you any leads on the people who did this?" Wilkie asked Leopold.

"One or two," Leopold told him. "But you might have some ideas yourself. Are there any rival firms that might profit from the theft of a high-capacity chip like this?"

"Any one of them. Simon Dolff has the capacity to reproduce the equivalent of an entire book on a single silicon chip—something no one thought would be possible before the end of the decade."

"Aren't the chip designs protected by law?"

"Bills are pending in Congress that would allow them to be covered by a copyright, but nothing has passed yet. As so often happens, technology is ahead of the law. Dolff's chip is fair game for whoever can manufacture it first."

Leopold grunted. "Maybe he should have kept it under wraps."

"In this business, you don't sell anything by keeping it too secret. He had to convince us he really had it."

"And did he do that?"

Wilkie looked puzzled. "What do you mean?"

"Is there any chance that Simon Dolff staged this whole charade to hide the fact that no super silicon chip existed?"

It was Martha who objected to that. "Surely some of the people at the reception had a chance to examine it before it was stolen."

"Of course," Wilkie said. "There were microscopes set up. If he was faking it, he'd have arranged the robbery much earlier."

Leopold had to agree they were right. "I'm glad your leg's coming

along," he said, standing. "Take care of yourself. You're our star witness if we ever find the false Mrs. Wilkie."

After lunch, back at headquarters, Fletcher told Leopold they'd located a brother of Jules Dermain. His name was Joseph Dermain and he ran a firm specializing in electronic and video games.

"The same initials," Fletcher noted, "J. Dermain. Like on that note."

"Where is he located?" Leopold asked. "New York, like his brother?"

"New Haven. He taught at Yale before he started his own business."

"That's not far," said Leopold.

"Let's drive over and see him."

New Haven was less than an hour away on the Turnpike. It was a city in transition and the great university that crowded into the western portion of the downtown area seemed to anchor a community in danger of fading away. They found Joseph Dermain's office in one of the taller buildings overlooking The Green at the center of the city. Fable Electronics was the name of his firm. The offices were small but luxurious.

"You've come quite a distance to see me," he said, ushering Leopold and Fletcher into his office. Joseph was a good deal taller than his brother Jules, and younger. Jules had spoken English with a French accent but he spoke perfect English. And while Jules Dermain had been a professor type, Joseph was the prototype of the American businessman. "What can I do for you?" he asked.

Leopold showed him a copy of the note. "I received this in the morning mail. I assumed it was a message from you."

Dermain seemed genuinely puzzled. "But why should I write to you? I don't even know you." His eyes wandered to the telephone as he spoke.

"I'm sure you're familiar with my investigation at the time of your brother's murder. I worked closely with the New York police in apprehending the killer."

"For which I am certainly grateful."

"Did you inherit your brother's business, Mr. Dermain?"

"Jules was ten years older than I. I was an infant when the family fled to America at the outbreak of war in Europe. I was educated

here in the American ways. My career has always leaned toward electronics and high technology. Jules had his games and puzzles."

"One of them—*Melrose*—made him a small fortune."

"That's correct. And yes, I did inherit the business when he died. But it's only a small division of Fable Electronics. Sometimes we talk about developing an electronic version of it, or even a video version."

"You must use silicon chips in your products."

"We use them, yes."

"One of a highly advanced design was stolen yesterday."

"I read about it in the papers."

"The method of the theft was so complex and clever, it reminded us of your brother's work."

"His work?"

"Let's not play games, Mr. Dermain. We both know your brother rented out his skills as a puzzle-maker to help create perfectly planned murders, robberies, and other crimes. Did you take over that portion of his business, too?"

"Certainly not! If that's what this mysterious message implies, I can only tell you it must be an attempt to frame me!"

"Then you have no knowledge of yesterday's theft?"

"None whatsoever." He glanced at the phone again. "Really, gentlemen, I'm sorry but my patience is wearing thin. Until now I haven't bothered to point out that you're outside your jurisdiction here. But I have other business that needs my attention."

"Of course," Leopold agreed with a smile. He and Leopold shook hands with Dermain and left.

They were passing through the outer office when they heard him buzz his secretary on the intercom. When she answered, his voice could be faintly heard instructing her, "Call Juliet."

Outside, Fletcher said, "You let him off easy."

"I noticed him glancing at the telephone a couple of times, as if he was anxious to make a call or about one he was expecting. The first time he looked was after I showed him the message I'd received."

"You think the J. in Dermain is Juliet?"

"Could be."

"His wife?"

"Or a sister. Let's check on it."

But from there, the case seemed to flounder. Norman Wilkie went home from the hospital and Simon Dolff filed a lawsuit against the

Parkside Hotel, charging that improper security arrangements contributed to the theft. Fletcher turned up nothing about a Juliet Dermain. Joseph's wife's name was Violet and there was no record of a sister coming with them from France. And since no murder was involved, Leopold couldn't justify devoting any more time or manpower to it.

"File it away," he told Connie a week later. "Unless there's a break, the investigation's over."

"Someone will try using that computer chip."

"The design isn't protected by copyright. They can claim they invented it on their own. We'd be helpless unless we could actually tie them to the robbery."

Molly was home from Boston and that evening Leopold outlined the case to her.

"Well," she said, "you've had a bit of excitement while I was away!"

"There's always excitement. Do you have any ideas about this one?"

She smiled. "Are you sure you want me to help you catch him when I could end up acting as counsel for the defense?"

"I suppose not," he replied. She was right. Sooner or later, her legal practice was going to bring her into conflict with his work. It was something he tried not to think about too often.

The following morning, they got the break he'd been hoping for. He arrived at the squadroom a little after nine to find Joseph Dermain seated on a straight-backed chair waiting to see him. Leopold coaxed two cups of coffee from the machine and ushered him into the office. "What can I do for you?"

"I have a confession to make," the tall man began.

"I'll call in a stenographer. I must warn you first of your rights."

"Not that sort of confession," Dermain said quickly, looking frightened. "I am not confessing to a crime, only to being less than frank with you last week in my office."

"I see."

"That message you received was written by Juliet Dermain, my dead brother's daughter."

"His daughter!"

Joseph Dermain nodded. "When you showed me that note, my first reaction was one of disbelief. I couldn't imagine her being involved in anything like this. But I telephoned her after your visit

and she more or less admitted it to me. She was the woman who impersonated Martha Wilkie. She simply chose one of the wives who most resembled her and hired an accomplice to chloroform her and get her down to the garage."

"And couldn't resist bragging about it in that message to me," Leopold said.

Joseph Dermain nodded. "I think she purposely signed it *J. Dermain* to heighten the connection with her dead father."

"Why are you telling me all this now?"

"Because her life is in danger. She phoned me last night and said the man who hired her to steal the computer chip is now refusing to pay her the amount agreed upon. When she threatened to tip off the police, he said he'd kill her. I think she's really frightened."

Leopold ignored his coffee. "Did you tell her you were coming to see me?"

"No. But I couldn't think of any other course of action. She's my niece, after all, and I want to protect her."

"What's the name of the man who hired her?"

"She wouldn't tell me."

"Where is she now?"

"Here in the city, at this address."

Leopold glanced at the slip of paper. "I'll have to arrest her, you must realize that."

"If it'll save her life, I'm willing to see her serve a short prison term."

"Very well," Leopold said. "We'll pick her up."

The address was a furnished apartment south of the Turnpike, not far from Long Island Sound. The neighborhood was one of transients and students, where few questions were asked. Leopold took Connie Trent with him to make the arrest, because they had both seen the impostor after the robbery at the hotel.

Leopold received no answer to his ring, but presently a middle-aged landlady appeared. "No Dermain here," she replied to his question. "That apartment is rented to Suzie Fable."

Remembering Fable Electronics, Leopold said, "That's who we want."

"I don't think she's up there. I haven't seen her this morning."

"Do you have a key to her apartment?" Leopold asked, showing his badge and I.D.

"Have you got a search warrant?"

"No. I'm just requesting a quick look inside."

"A quick look is all you'll get—with me along. If you want to do any searching, come back with a warrant."

She unlocked the door—and that was how they found the body, a pair of pantyhose around her throat.

Leopold thought it was the woman who had impersonated Martha Wilkie, and Connie confirmed it.

"She's been dead several hours," Leopold estimated. "Maybe since last night. Better get the crew up here, Connie."

"Dermain's warning came too late."

He nodded. "So we need to know who hired her and who killed her. See if you can reach Dermain and tell him what's happened."

"Here's something, Captain," Connie said, bending down to retrieve a sheet of paper half hidden by the body. "She was trying to write something when she died."

Leopold studied the paper and the black plastic pen still clutched in her hand. "STAR CO," he read. "Ever hear of a Star Company, Connie?"

"Not offhand, but I'll check on it."

"Something in the computer or electronics field, I'd guess. Maybe the people who hired her. She was certainly trying to tell us something when she died."

The autopsy report later that day confirmed the cause of death as asphyxiation, the result of strangulation by the knotted pantyhose around her neck. Connie had sent her fingerprints to Washington for an identity check, but it would be the following day before they heard anything on that. Meanwhile, they'd turned up only one Star Company in the immediate area, a meatpacker who denied any knowledge of Juliet Dermain, Suzie Fable, or computers in general.

"Another dead end," Fletcher grumbled as the afternoon dragged on. "You found us a body, Captain, but we're no nearer to winding up this case."

"Maybe we're closer than we realize," Leopold said.

Norman Wilkie and his wife had both viewed the body of the woman before the autopsy and he confirmed the identification. Martha had never seen her impostor. Wilkie's boss, Jim Tarco, accompanied them but could add nothing. As far as he knew, he'd never seen the woman nor had any dealings with her.

When Joseph-Dermain reached Leopold's office, he was in a state of great distress. He paced the floor, berating himself for not having

acted sooner. "She might still be alive if I'd told you what I knew last week."

"You can tell me what else you know right now," Leopold said. "Your niece needed a male helper to pull off that robbery—someone to help her chloroform Martha Wilkie and get her down to the garage. Do you have any idea who your niece was hanging around with?"

"None."

"It might be the helper who killed her rather than the person who hired her. They could have had a falling-out over the payoff."

"Sorry," he said. "I can't help you. I never saw Juliet socially. I have no idea who her friends were."

"Ever hear of the Star Company?"

"No. Should I have?"

"It seems to have been important to your niece in her dying moment."

He shook his head. "It's a blank to me."

"It seems likely that she might have tried to identify the company that hired her, but we can't find any computer or video-game firms with that name."

"Maybe it's not a company," Dermain suggested. "It could be a video game—or even a rock group. Maybe it's the name of a person and she died before she could finish writing it."

"Perhaps," Leopold admitted. "Tell me something else. What do these silicon computer chips sell for in the open market?"

"A state-of-the-art chip at the present time costs around six dollars. But if the stolen design is half as revolutionary as Simon Dolff claims, he could probably get ten dollars each for them."

"Interesting. One would have to sell a great many to show a quarter-million-dollar profit."

"Believe me, one successful video game could do it, and all the sales to computer firms and the government would be gravy."

"If you hear of anyone trying to market it in competition with Dolff, let me know."

Dermain smiled. "I'm sure he'll let you know even faster than I will."

When he was alone, Leopold took out the sheet of paper they'd found under the body of the dead woman. STAR CO—that was all it said. He'd had it dusted for prints and found only a few smudges.

And yet—

He squinted at the paper in its protective plastic sheath, wishing his eyes were better. He took out the reading glasses he'd been forced to wear on occasion and stared hard at the paper just to the left of the S. There were definite marks—three short parallel lines like those in an E.

"Connie!" he called out.

She left her desk in the squadroom and came into his office.

"Have you found something, Captain?"

"I think so. Where's the ballpoint pen we found in her hand?"

"I'll get it for you." She returned in a moment with the pen. "It doesn't write very well."

"That's what I thought." He had to attempt several lines on his scratch pad before the ink began to flow. "Look here—she tried to write at least one other letter before the S."

"I think you're right. It looks like an E."

"And there are other marks before that. You can barely see them."

"What does it mean?"

"That we've got our killer at last. Come on!"

They found Jim Tarco at the local office of Video Pastimes. Norman Wilkie was still with him. Since driving in to identify the body, they'd decided to do some work and save a later trip.

"Do you have something new?" Norman Wilkie asked as Leopold and Connie entered the office.

"We think so. We're here to make an arrest."

Wilkie paled noticeably. "If you think my wife was involved in this plot—"

Leopold ignored him and turned to his employer instead. "Mr. Tarco, I must advise you of your right to an attorney and warn you that anything you say—"

"What's this?" Jim Tarco exploded. "Are you mad?"

"The whole plot to substitute an impostor for Mrs. Wilkie would have failed if you or your wife had happened along. But you didn't, did you? And you stayed away when the supposed Mrs. Wilkie was found in the ladies' room, too, even though you could have ruined her escape with one word."

"There were two hundred people in that room!" Tarco blustered. "We didn't know what was going on until later!"

"What about Juliet Dermain?"

"Who?"

"The woman you hired to carry out the robbery. The one whose

body you saw earlier. She left a dying message. At first we thought it said STAR CO, but her pen didn't work on the first few letters, and her spacing between the words was bad. She was really trying to write *James Tarco*, wasn't she?"

"That's absurd!"

"You hired her and you killed her, Mr. Tarco. You wanted that silicon chip for Video Pastimes."

"You'd be laughed out of court with that evidence."

"I don't think so. Judges and juries give a great deal of weight to a murder victim's dying declaration."

Toward evening, Fletcher found Leopold alone in his office. "Captain, they want to know when you're going to file formal murder charges against James Tarco."

"Not tonight," Leopold answered with a sigh. "We can hold him till morning."

"The interrogation didn't get anything?"

"It didn't get a confession, and that's the only thing that counts."

"You think we might be wrong on this one?"

"You mean *I* might be wrong?"

"It's not a matter of right or wrong, Captain. It's whether we have enough evidence for the D.A. to prosecute."

"I know, I know." Leopold was feeling depressed.

"You think Wilkie or his wife might have been in on it, after all? Connie said he looked a bit frightened when you and she went to the Video Pastimes office today."

"It was a natural reaction."

"Well, then—"

Fletcher was interrupted by the arrival of Molly Calendar. Leopold's young wife entered without being announced and sat down in the chair opposite Leopold's desk. "Who called you?" Leopold asked.

"Connie. You can be happy it wasn't Jim Tarco. You've got no sort of case against him."

Leopold closed his eyes. "Is that a professional opinion, counselor?"

"I'm just trying to help. I want you home."

"All right, if Tarco wasn't behind the scheme, who was?"

"It seems obvious to me," Molly answered. "You've been overlooking the most likely villain."

And suddenly he knew what she meant . . .

The following morning, Leopold paid another call at Joseph Dermain's New Haven office.

"Got the case wrapped up yet?" the tall man asked, welcoming him with a smile.

"Just about, Mr. Dermain."

"I see in the paper that you're holding Jim Tarco for questioning. Is he the one?"

Leopold shook his head. "You're the one. You sent me a note and told me so."

"Oh?" Dermain kept on smiling. "I thought we'd been through that before."

"You told me the signature *J. Dermain* was your niece, Juliet—Jules Dermain's daughter. But Jules didn't have a daughter, and the dead woman has been identified as Suzie Foxe, a former Las Vegas showgirl with a record for swindles and confidence games. Juliet Dermain never existed, despite the fake phone call I heard you make."

"Fancy that."

"You hired this Suzie Foxe and you went with her to the hotel last week, probably slightly disguised so you wouldn't be spotted by your friends in the business. I'll admit I'm guessing about that, but I'm not guessing at the rest. You killed her, probably because she wanted more money, and you faked that dying message implicating Jim Tarco."

"You have no evidence of this."

"I think I do—evidence I should have seen a lot sooner than I did. People who are strangled don't leave dying messages—because they're unconscious before they die. If she wrote that message before Tarco strangled her, he certainly wouldn't have left it at the scene. And after he strangled her, she'd have been unconscious, if not dead. If she regained consciousness after he left, it would mean she could get air into her lungs and she wouldn't have died."

"That proves the message was a fake," said Dermain. "It doesn't prove I faked it."

"This does. Yesterday in my office you became concerned that we hadn't tumbled to the relatively simple dying message you'd invented to implicate Jim Tarco, so you gave me a hint. You said maybe it was the name of a person and she died before she could finish writing it. But I never told you she'd written anything. I only said that Star Company was important to her in her dying moment."

"I don't—"

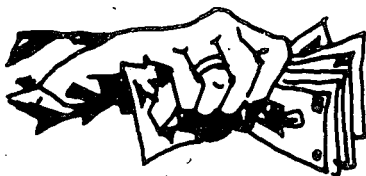
"Actually, Suzie Foxe herself did leave us a dying message of a sort—something she must have thought up weeks ago when she took that apartment. She said her name was Suzie Fable, linking her with your Fable Electronics firm. Maybe she thought even then that something bad might happen to her."

Joseph Dermain was staring at him. "You're a clever man, Leopold."

"So are you. But you couldn't resist sending me that note, carrying on your brother's tradition."

"It'll still take twelve people to convict me," Dermain said. "I'll take my chances."

"Then let's get going," Leopold told him. "We released Jim Tarco this morning, so we've got a cell all ready for you."



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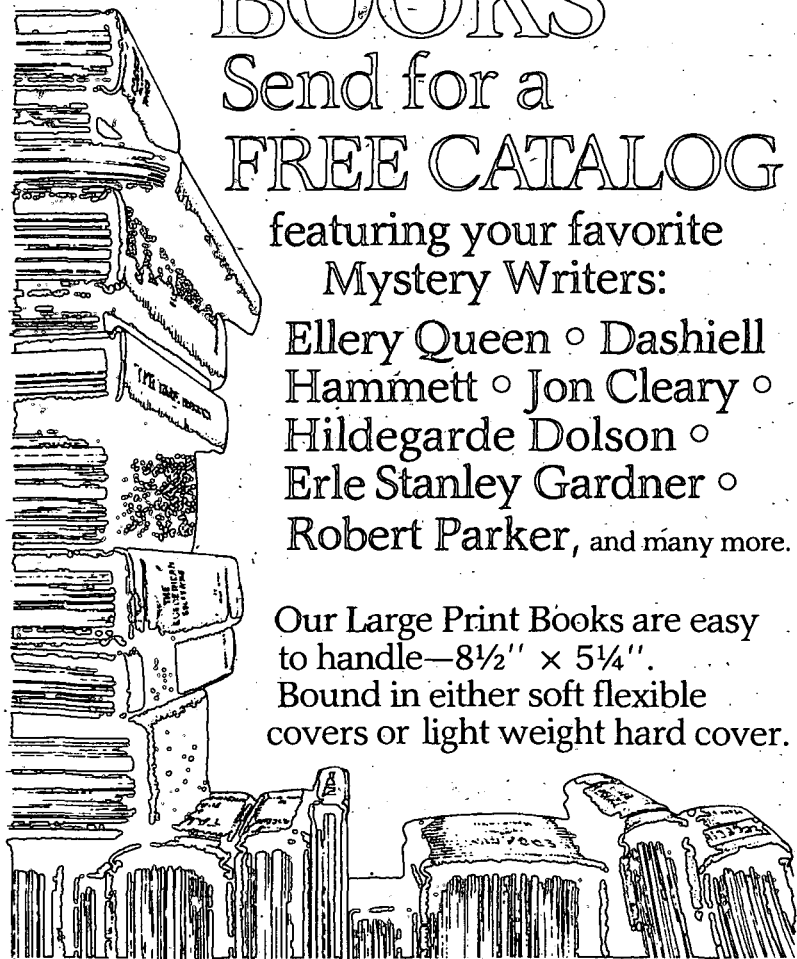
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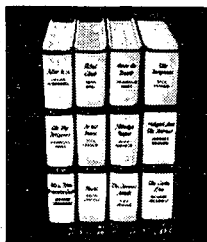
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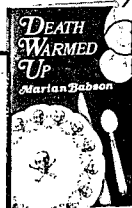
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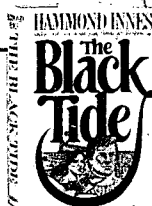
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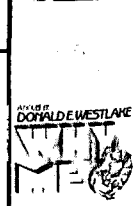
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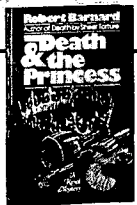
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